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TRAVELER

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By ANDREW MCCARTHY

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A R A I N B O W of Flavor

South Africa's diverse cultures have created a rich and vibrant cooking style that makes for a delicious melting pot. With such an astonishing mix of influences, from European, Asian, and African cuisines, South African fare is one of the best ways to discover the rainbow of diversity that makes up this country.

What to eat:

Bunny chow: A hollowed-out quarter loaf of bread is filled with spicy chicken, beef, or bean curry. Portable and delicious, this take-out food should be eaten without utensils.

Biltong: South Africa's national snack! Similar to beef jerky, this treat is marinated in vinegar and salt, air-cured, seasoned with coriander, and typically sliced into thick strips. Biltong is also featured in stews or added to bread.

Peri-Peri: Onions, garlic, a variety of herbs and spices, and crushed chili peppers compose this spicy Portuguese-influenced sauce, which makes prawns, chicken, and everything else piquant and delectable.

What to drink:

With South Africa ranking as one of the top ten wine producing countries in the world, you should drink it all! There are more than 200 wineries in the area, bottling everything from crisp whites to heavy ports. Wine tours are a great way to explore specific regions and to help ensure tastings of award-winning vintages. Renting a car and visiting some of the many districts can quench your thirst as well—the visual splendor of South Africa's wine country makes it a destination in its own right.



Enjoying South African fare alfresco in Cape Town is a local favorite pastime

SPICED BEEF STEW

2.2 pounds beef chuck, cleaned and cut into 2-3 inch cubes
2 beef stock cubes
2 medium onions, finely chopped
8 baby (new) potatoes, peeled and halved
4 large carrots, peeled and sliced
9 ounces green beans, sliced
2 medium tomatoes, peeled and grated
1 tsp fresh thyme, leaves only
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
4 bay leaves
1/2 tsp cayenne pepper
salt and white pepper, to taste

Directions: (serves 8-10)
Put beef, bay leaves, and beef stock cubes into a deep pot and cover with water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until tender, about 1 hour. Add the remaining ingredients and cook until the vegetables are soft, about 30 minutes. Remove bay leaves and serve hot.



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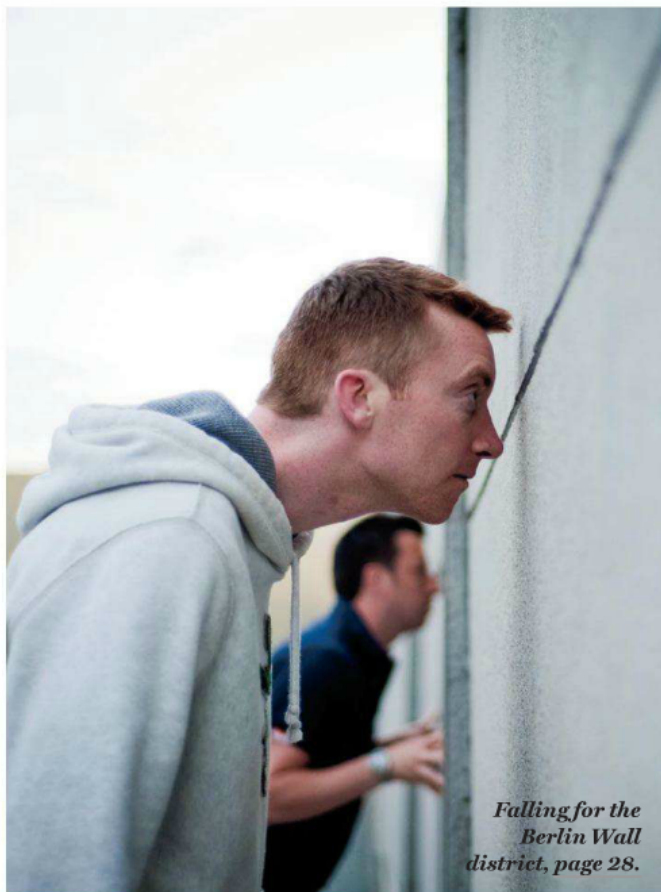
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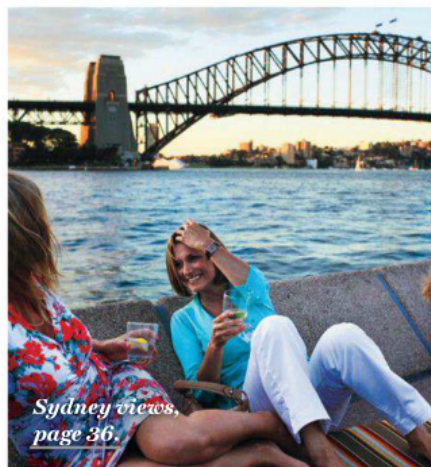
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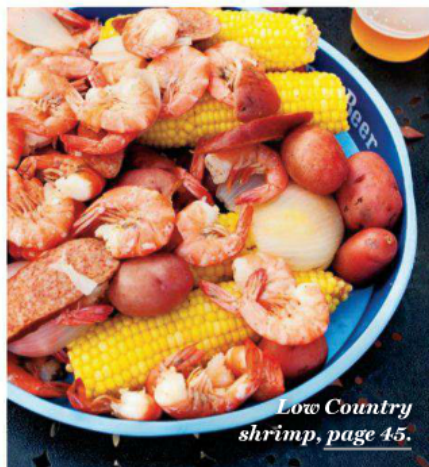
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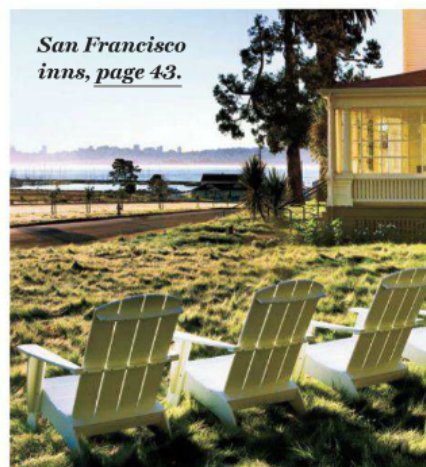
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ON THE COVER: *Racconigi Castle, Piedmont, Italy, by Clay McLachlan*

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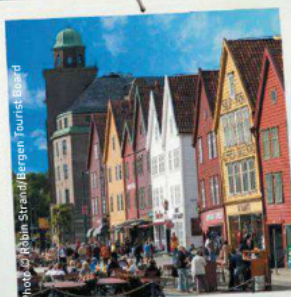
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Actor and writer Andrew McCarthy has forged his way taking the road less traveled.

[EDITOR'S NOTE]

Going Off-Script

WHEN I MET ANDREW MCCARTHY, I knew him as the actor who starred in *Pretty in Pink*, *St. Elmo's Fire*, and *Weekend at Bernie's*. "Travel changed my life," he told me over dinner one night. "I want to write about it. And I want to write for *Traveler*." If that was truly his desire, I pointed out, he was about to take a massive pay cut. Freelance writing funds very small meals. He shrugged and said that writing was his passion. "Have you ever written for magazines?" I asked. "No, but I can do it," he replied. We hear this a lot. People think travel writing is a breeze. It isn't.

"Forget being a travel writer," I advised. "Be a writer who travels." We talked about what makes a good story: a strong premise and narrative arc. Crisp dialogue. Great characters. Colorful detail. A point of view. All things, he observed, that distinguish good movies and television. Ultimately persuaded, I banked on his innate sense of story, and he delivered a fine piece set in Ireland that needed surprisingly little editing (it also got a nod in 2007's *Best American Travel Writing* anthology). Now on our masthead, McCarthy has been published widely and has justly earned many accolades. This fall his writing appears in bookstores with *The Longest Way Home: One Man's Quest for the Courage to Settle Down*—a find for anyone who believes in the transformative power of travel. When he first described the book, he told me his publisher calls it a male version of Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*, but in reverse. *The Longest Way Home* chronicles a voyage of self-discovery—in Patagonia, Costa Rica, Baltimore, Vienna, Kilimanjaro—taken before he married. "In a taxi on my way to Patagonia, I couldn't reconcile my sadness to go and thrill to leave, my fiancée at home and a new adventure ahead," he explains. "The book just laid itself out to me." Read an essay by McCarthy on [page 96](#). —KEITH BELLOWS

[FOREIGN DESK]

ST. PETERSBURG SECRETS

On page 62, writer Scott Wallace finds St. Petersburg reinvigorated. We asked Lidia Razzhivaikina, managing editor of *National Geographic Traveler Russia*, to share a few insider's tips:

FREE PARKING

Take a tour around the city parks, which are splendid and colorful in fall, the "golden season." Stroll along the lanes of the oldest city park, the free Summer Garden (or Letniy Sad), which recently reopened after years of restoration.

EASY AS PIE

Stolle pie cafés (I like the one on Vasilyevsky Island) serve every taste bud—sweet with berries or savory with mushrooms, potatoes, and, my favorite, salmon.

HOT SPOT

Warm up with a cup of tea or coffee in a cozy nook, such as at second-floor Singer Café in House of Books, which overlooks the Kazan Cathedral in the onetime headquarters of the Singer Sewing Company.



SHOPPING TSAR

Behind the Church of the Savior on Spilled Blood [above], a marketplace sells Russian souvenirs including vintage photos of the city.

MIND THE GAP

The drawbridges spanning the Neva, such as the illuminated cast-iron Palace Bridge, make a spectacular night show. Just don't get stranded overnight while the bridges are raised.



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Award-winning photographer Raymond Gehman's images have appeared in *National Geographic* and other publications. He lives in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania.

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RAYMOND GEHMAN

My first national park memory dates back to when I was eight and my parents piled all of us kids into the car to spend the day on Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park. My dad took snapshots of the family posed in front of the overlooks. Fast-forward many years and I was working as a photojournalist for a large newspaper. One day, *National Geographic* called and offered me my first big assignment, documenting Yellowstone National Park through all four seasons. It was there that I discovered an affinity for photographing landscapes and wildlife.

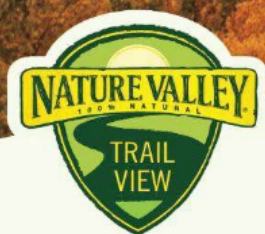
I have shot nearly every national park in the country. This image from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park showcases Sugarland Mountain in spectacular autumn colors, viewed from the Chimney Tops Trail. The sun's backlighting brings a lively luminescence to the sea of trees. The national parks offer everyone a chance to experience America as it once was, a grand, mysterious, and challenging environment. When you climb to the top of a rocky peak, it allows you to connect with something much larger than yourself.

MY VIEW

Capturing Luminescence ^{IN}
Great Smoky Mountains
National Park

This is Raymond's view.
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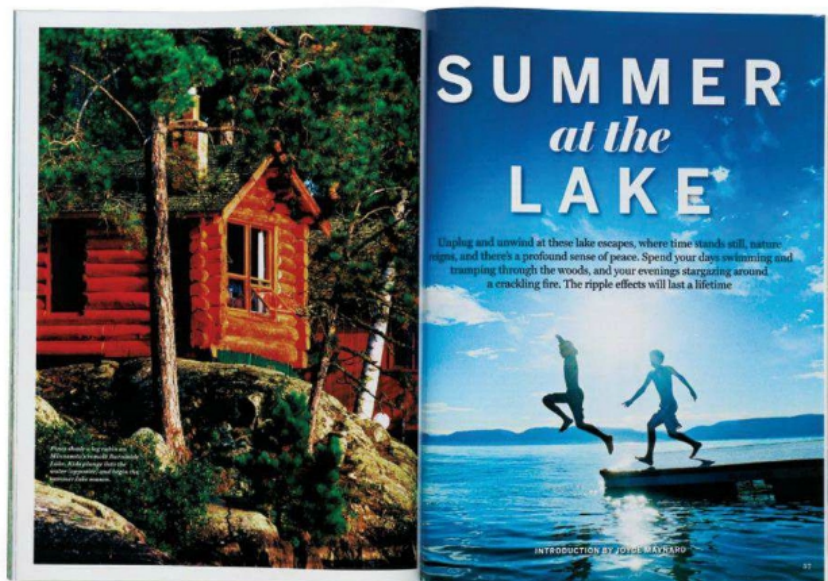
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The Ripple Effect

A H, THE LAKE ESCAPE. Could there be a more personal travel preference? Our survey of the best North American blue spots, "Summer at the Lake" (June/July 2012), made a splash—in our inbox, on our Intelligent Travel blog and Facebook page, and across Twitter (one reader's #PeaceOnEarth hash tag says it all). "You hit it on the head—Flathead Lake is the ultimate summer adventure," wrote Dave Ayers of **Polson, Mont.** Our pick of New York's Saranac Lake earned kudos, too. "We love kayaking to one of the small island campgrounds and playing Robinson Crusoe for a few days," added Sandra Foyt of **Albany, N.Y.** Regrettably, our pining to recline at sunset on an Adirondack chair seems to have clouded our attention

to detail. Saranac fans were quick to offer corrections: We confused New York's Panther Peak with Panther Mountain; the latter is the family-friendly hike to 2,225 feet that we intended to highlight. The article also undersold "the 46"—the Adirondack High Peaks, which measure 3,800 feet or higher, not 2,000 feet.

ROB REPORT Daisann McLane's June/July 2012 Real Travel column, "Robbed? There May Be an Upside,"

recalled a bittersweet memory for Rhonda Erwin of **Austin, Tex.** "Last year while visiting Cuba, I was mugged in the airport and lost my camera, an iPod, \$2,000 cash, and my passport. Like Daisann, I had let my travel guard down—I was tired and had visited Havana previously and felt as though my trip was a homecoming. Oh, how I mourned the visas in my 12-year-old passport. I cried for two days. Then I had an epiphany—*om shanti!* Liberated from the unimportance of material

things, I started with a clean slate (and a temporary passport). Strangers gave me food, money, free taxi rides, even souvenirs; a fellow hotel guest who witnessed the crime checked on me daily. I gained a true understanding of living like a local. You can't judge a place by a singular bad experience—or by one person."

LEST WE FORGET "On the War Path" (June/July 2012) proved timely reading material. "Tony Horwitz's article was a wonderful insight into the mid-Atlantic phase of the Civil War," wrote Sherwin J. Klein of **Niles, Ill.** "It brought to mind the great importance of the battles at Harpers Ferry and the many soldiers who lost their lives in the Battle of Antietam. How appropriate for this Memorial Day."

OH LA LA "Vive la Montreal!" proclaimed our June/July 2012 cover. **Québécois** reader Vanessa Udy appreciated the coverage of local treats such as the "delicious mystery dish" *poutine* (gravy-covered fries) but cried foul about our linguistic faux pas of including "la" in front of a city name.

[READER'S CHOICE]

URBAN FLIGHT

What's your best escape from a big city? We posed that question to coincide with "Now Leaving London" (May 2012) about trips within 100 miles of the capital.

“

"My favorite thing to do in the summer is hop on a train to the Jersey Shore. There are a lot of misconceptions about Jersey, but this is a real beach getaway: good waves, wide beaches, and shoes off and bathing suit on until it's time to go home."

JENNIFER RAEZER
NEW YORK CITY

"Central Ohio offers great slices of small-town America: beautiful courthouses, main streets with antique shops, mom-and-pop restaurants, town squares with gazebos."

BILL BULLOCK
COLUMBUS, OHIO



"Bucharest, Romania, can feel crowded, stressed, and messy. When I want fresh air and a little culture, I choose the medieval city of Sighisoara. The clock tower [above] has an extraordinary view of the old city."

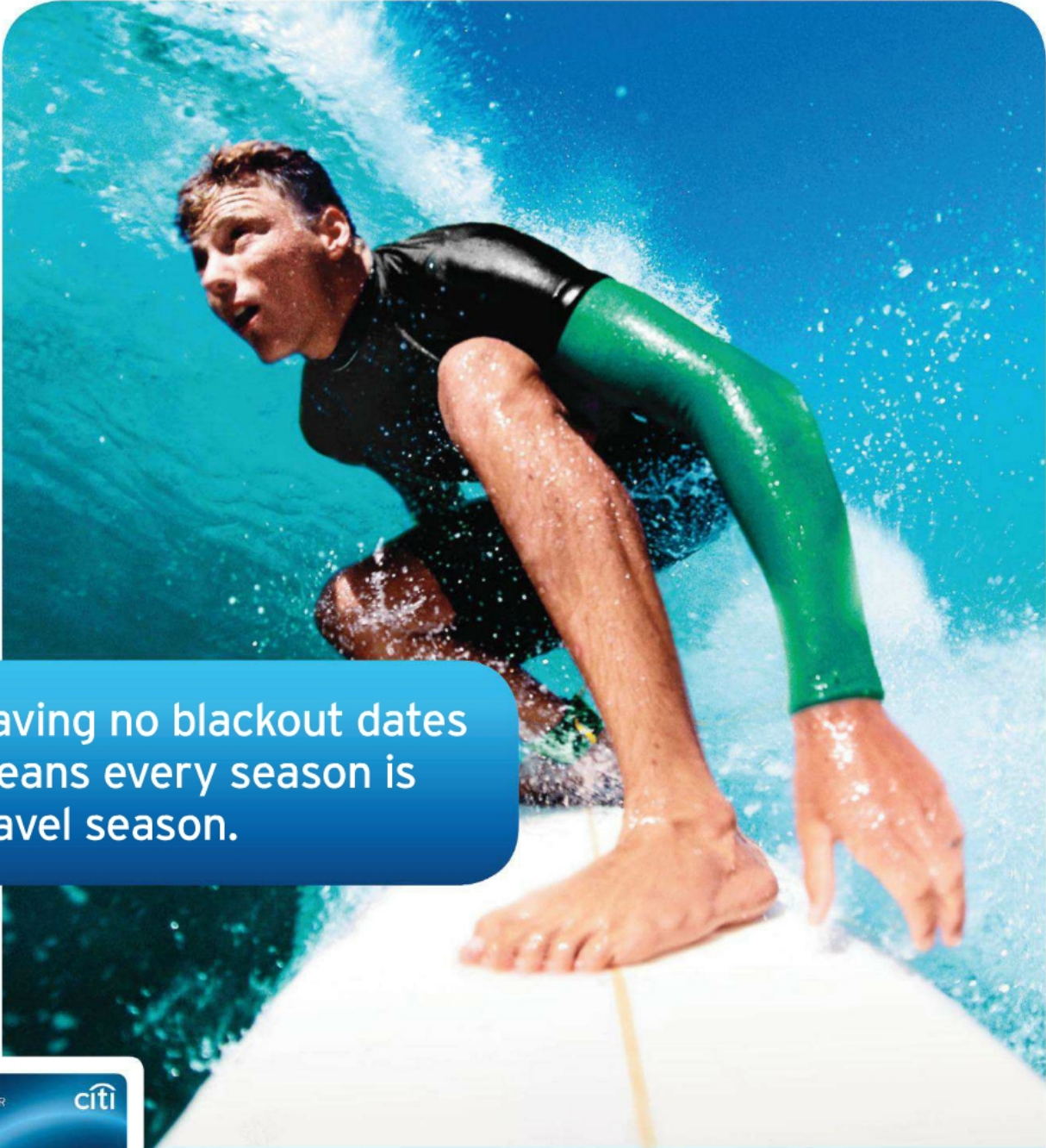
ANA TUDORACHE
BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

"Puerto Rico: We fly into busy San Juan but always visit San Sebastián, in the island's west, where life is more agrarian."

CINDY LIN
PERTH AMBOY, N.J.

”

NEXT QUESTION: Where have you traveled to feel better—mind or body? Send stories and photos to Travel_talk@ngs.org.

A man in a black wetsuit with green sleeves is surfing on a white surfboard, riding a wave. The water is a vibrant blue with white foam from the breaking wave.

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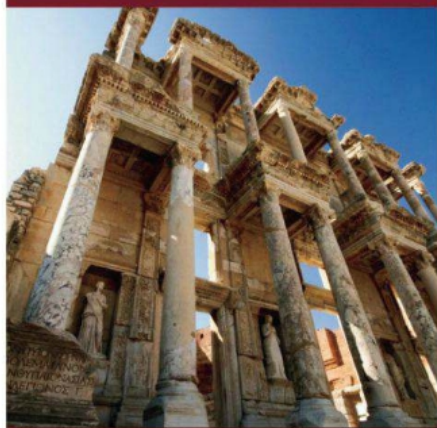


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THE EVENT

From the Ground Up

AS NEW MEXICO CELEBRATES A CENTURY of statehood this year, the **Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta** launches its 41st year of painting the Duke City's sky a kaleidoscope of color. From October 6 to 14, hundreds of hot-air balloons (593 to be exact) representing 19 countries take to the wild turquoise yonder, with the Sandia Mountains as backdrop and the Rio Grande below. "It's the mecca for balloonists," says Troy Bradley, president of the Balloon Federation of America. The most popular events include the weekend mass ascensions, but the weekday competitions that test the skills of the best pilots are worth getting up early for. Dress in layers and beat the traffic by taking one of the designated buses to the launch field, and enjoy a breakfast burrito with in-season green chili as you watch the balloons inflate. Or sign up to be part of a chase crew, in which you track your balloon and help it land. You may even score a flight yourself. —STEVE LARESE

Albuquerque's hot-air balloon event is the world's largest.

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*Trails at Le Massif
ski resort seem to
drop directly into the
St. Lawrence River.*

PHOTO: SHUTTER

THE PLACE

Quebec's Powder Outlet

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL'S indomitable co-creator, Daniel Gauthier, turned his focus from the big top to big drops with his latest project, revitalization of the Quebec ski haven **Le Massif de Charlevoix**. Gauthier invested \$300 million to transform his local ski slope, about 47 miles northeast of Quebec City, into a sustainability-minded, all-season, vacation destination. An expanded resort opened in 2004 with 53 trails. La Ferme, a new green hotel complete with farmers market, began welcoming guests this past spring. Gauthier also renovated a run-down freight line to convey visitors the two and a half hours between Quebec City and the foot of the slopes. Specially designed railcars showcase the passing scenery—Montmorency Falls, forested hills, the St. Lawrence River's craggy shoreline—while the onboard menu touts regional cuisine such as escargot terrine with Charlevoix oyster mushrooms. And the skiing? Le Massif features one of the highest vertical drops east of the Rockies (2,526 feet) and an average of 22 feet of snow annually. —GREGORY B. GALLAGHER

LE MASSIF DE CHARLEVOIX/BENJAMIN GARCIA



THE PERSON

Global Tastemaker

SUSAN FENIGER tallies her travels with food—buttery potatoes at a Holland farm, salmon tacos in Mexico, crispy *pani puri* in Mumbai. A veteran of the Food Network's *Too Hot Tamales* and Bravo's *Top Chef Masters*, the acclaimed L.A. chef of 30-plus years voraciously travels the globe's food stands. Her latest dining venture, Street, assembles the planet's best snacks, from Singaporean *kaya* (coconut egg jam) toast to Jamaican jerk chicken, which she shares in a new recipe and travel book, *Susan Feniger's Street Foods*.

What inspired your multicultural kitchen? In 1981, I took my first trip to India and fell in love. I suddenly became aware of tamarind and curry neem leaf, dals, chai; even

cilantro and okra were new. I planted black mustard seeds when I got home. Walking through a market in India, seeing turmeric, cayenne, red pepper—that trip shaped my tastes, my style, my color palette. I still wear bangles.

What kind of traveler are you? I don't go to museums or art galleries. I walk the streets and meet people. And that opens a door to a possible invitation to their home. You're not able to glimpse into someone's real life when you're sightseeing. There's something special about sharing food, even with a language

barrier. I learn about the culture, the history, about what's real, what's passionate. It's not about a meal; it's the experience of going from one place to the next.

Any advice for food-loving travelers? Find a guide who will take you into the neighborhoods. In Vietnam, I ended up at a stand in an alley with a woman cooking marinated pork on this rinky-dink grill, very long and thin. She would toss noodles with herbs and pickled carrots and top it all with grilled pork. Motorcycles were going by; people were coming and going, and I was sitting at a two-foot-tall picnic table on a tiny stool, maybe six inches off the ground. Street stands like that are where you'll find the most incredible food. Whether you're in Turkey or Spain or India, people love that you're willing to try.

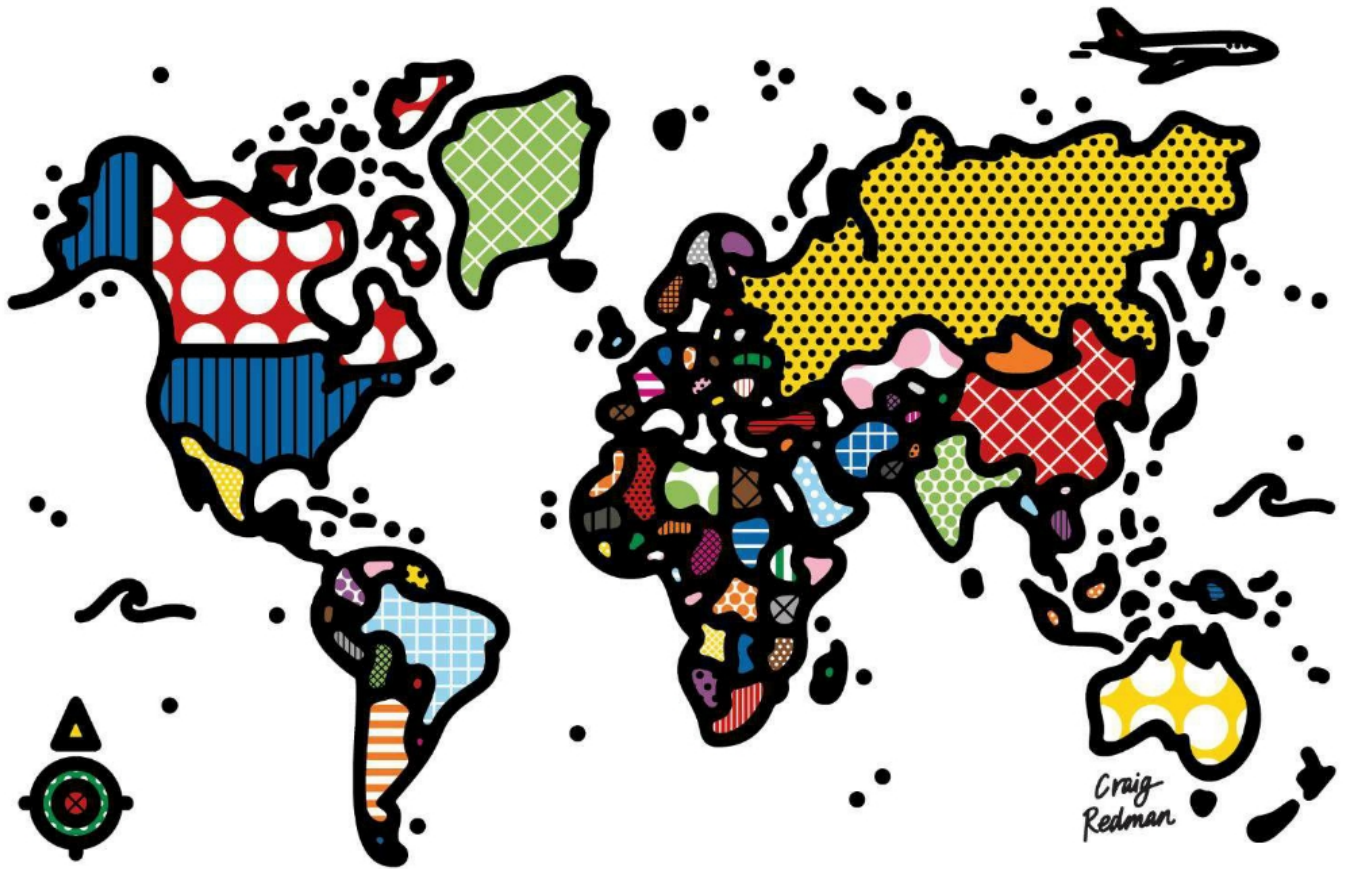
What's your travel philosophy? I put myself into places that take me out of anything that feels familiar, which opens me up to understanding cultures and the world in a different way. Travel is about connecting with people. Food is a vehicle to get us there.

—Katie Knorovsky



Chef Susan Feniger enjoys kaya toast in Los Angeles.

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CAPE TOWN

GLOBAL RECIPE

Cape Town has food at its heart. It was founded to supply provisions to sailing ships carrying precious cargoes of exotic spices from the East Indies. Since then, a world of sailors, settlers, slaves, adventurers, and more has shaped the city into a multicultural food capital where a medley of influences mixed through the centuries has created the vibrant food and restaurant scene of modern Cape Town.

Cape Town's first colonists were Dutch, and the Dutch Afrikaans influence remains strong. Spot a heavy, three-legged cast-iron pot and you're looking at *potjiekos*—traditional Afrikaans alfresco cooking. Lift the tight-fitting lid and inside simmers a moist meat stew covered by layers of vegetables and infused with handfuls of herbs and spices—all slow-cooked for hours. And of course when the weather is good the air is filled with the unmistakable smoky smell of a thousand *braais*. The *braai*, or barbecue, is a national pastime and no *braai* is complete without *boerwors*. This spiral-shaped "farmer sausage" evolved from the traditional Dutch sausage through the addition of spices such as black pepper, nutmeg, and cloves.

The Dutch were joined by settlers from Flanders, France, Germany, Italy, Greece, and a prominent Jewish community—all bringing their cultures and cuisines to Cape Town's melting pot. Chinese and Indian immigrants then added their own East and South-Asian styles and flavours to the brew. A further fiery zing comes from the colonial cookery of neighboring Mozambique and Cape Town's Portuguese community: The world famous *Peri-Peri* chicken is very much a South-African dish.

In the eighteenth century the arrival of prisoners from Java turned up the heat on Cape Town's

cooking. Javanese chefs were highly prized, and their spicy influence is everywhere—but especially among the large Cape Malay community they founded. It's the beautiful blending of spices that gives Cape Malay cuisine its alluring appearance, aroma, and taste. Turmeric adds a lovely yellow coloring to delicious Cape Malay curries, and all dishes are delicately flavored with select blends of chilli, cinnamon, cumin, coriander seed, cardamom, and cloves—and that's just the spices beginning with 'c'!

To find the best Cape Malay foods you must follow your nose to the street corners and hidden cafes where they will happily cook up the real deal for you. Seek out trays of crispy samosas, packets of snake-shaped *slangetjies*, and don't





even think about leaving without sampling the king of Cape dishes—the *bobotie*. This unique meat loaf is mixed with onion, sultanas, almonds, bay leaf, and spices, then topped with egg custard and baked—modest but absolutely marvelous.

The city's most recent influx of immigrants is from within Africa. Nigerians, Zimbabweans, Malawians, and more are adding their influences to the already cosmopolitan mix—inspiring the next generation of tastes being cooked up in Cape Town's kitchens. The aromatic fresh food markets where many Capetonians shop are bursting with the colorful bounty of land and sea, offering the perfect motivation to enjoy a little self-catering. To all this must be added the recent explosion of the international restaurant scene which now offers everything from Thai,

Vietnamese, and Japanese cooking to American, South American, and Middle-Eastern dishes. With such a rich, deep-rooted culinary heritage it is little wonder that Cape Town is the multicultural food capital of South Africa. And experiencing all this amazing food is easy, even for visitors. From the friendly and informal back-street kitchens where Malay ladies in headscarves conjure up their culinary magic with a handful of spices to the city's plethora of internationally acclaimed restaurants including some rated in the world's top 100, you don't have to go far to find great food in Cape Town—and it's all served up with the Mother City's world famous warm welcome.

Find out more about Cape Town's fantastic food, wine, and restaurants by visiting www.capetown.travel.

Images counterclockwise from top left: Aromatic spices give Cape Malay cooking its distinctive flavour; fresh local seafood served with a fresh sea breeze; a cast iron pot for Potjiekos cooks on an open fire; the iconic braai with boerwors sausages is as South African as it gets; the king of Cape cuisine—the bobotie with banana and chutney; a simple sandwich becomes sensational with fresh local ingredients.



National Geographic's Digital Nomad, Andrew Evans, visited Cape Town recently. Relive his Cape Town journey, experiences and insights at:



nationalgeographic.com/digitalnomad

THE MILESTONE

Once More Unto the Breach

AT NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE'S Olde Angels Inn pub (established 1789), locals will gladly share the story of their idyllic Ontario town's role as a battleground in the War of 1812. This fierce conflict—which actually spanned three years—sparked the burning of the White House by the British, inspired the penning of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and ultimately staved off the United States’ annexing of the British-controlled “Canadas.” Heated stuff for neighbors who’ve shared barely a cross word since. Canadians and Americans still disagree on who won the war. “The truth is, one could give reasons to name Britain, Canada, or the U.S. as the victors,” says Wesley Turner, retired history professor and co-chair of the town’s **War of 1812 bicentennial** committee. The now friendly debate continues this fall with a reenactment of the pivotal Battle of Queenston Heights on October 13. Cycling and walking tours of the town’s 1812 sites visit Fort George and the home-
stead of Upper Canada heroine Laura Secord. Bicentennial events also take place at Fort Erie, 35 miles south, one of Canada’s bloodiest fields of battle. —LIZ BEATTY



Reenactors stage the bloody Siege of Fort Erie, Ontario.

It's time for Two Wheels in Taiwan



Bikers enjoy Sun Moon Lake

Taiwan calls itself the “kingdom of bicycles.” And although the island is home to the world’s two leading bike brands, the nickname comes from its large biking population. Because of this, a nationwide system of dedicated paths and routes, with rental outlets, has taken shape. Taipei’s riverside bike path system loops the city and moves up to the ocean. Sun Moon Lake bike path offers breathtaking views and is a circuit of 33 kilometers in length. Jiji has its famed tree-shaded Green Tunnel, and Sanyi its old railway line route. Meinong offers farm country trails with a high-mountain backdrop. Jincheng is the gateway to flat, quiet, bike-friendly Kinmen Island. And Ruisui, along with the entire East Rift Valley, offers slow biking between two tall mountain chains in a rural, pastel-shaded setting. For more information on Taiwan, visit www.taiwan.net.tw

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THE OPENING

The Louvre's New Groove

THE BUY

Finnish Line

THE SAARINEN TULIP chair, the bulbous Aalto vase, the Nokia cell phone—Finnish design has long made waves in the global marketplace. As Helsinki celebrates its reign as the 2012 World Design Capital, travelers can take home a coin purse (above), tea towel, or serving tray all stamped with city landmarks. Per-Olof Nyström's **revived 1952 print for Marimekko**—Finland's bold textile/design label turned household name by Jackie Kennedy in the 1960s—features stylized drawings of such spots as the boat-lined harbor, Helsinki Cathedral, Old Market Hall, and Klippan restaurant.

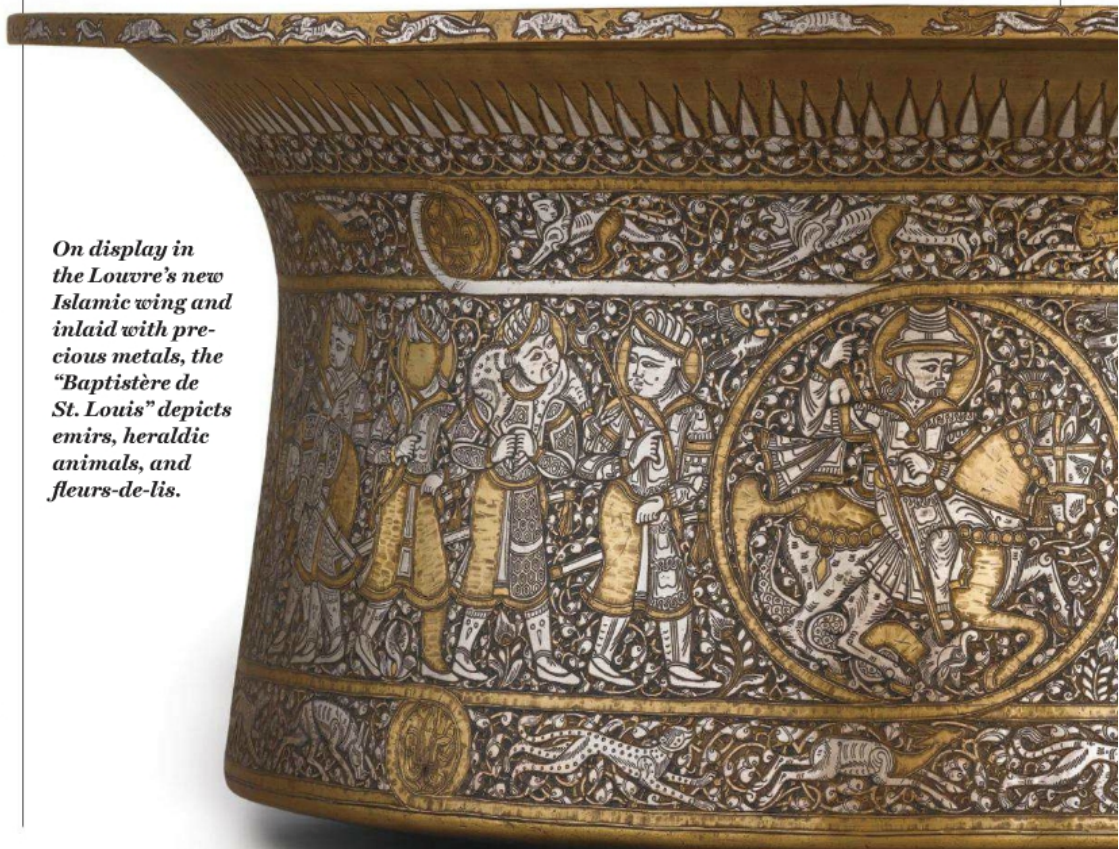
Art history lovers can scarcely turn a corner in the seaport without encountering architectural standouts, from Eliel Saarinen's Helsinki Central railway station in the national romantic style to the modular Aalto house and studio in the western Munkkiniemi district. To get a feel for today's design landscape, tour Marimekko's working print factory (find a city map identifying other art stops such as the Vallila studio of textile designer Erja Hirvi at www.marimekko.com/village), or shop the scene around the downtown Design District.

"When I'm looking for a special gift, I go to Kruuna Finnish Living in Kruununka," says local ceramics designer Sami Ruotsalainen, who says he has found vintage treasures there including minimalist Kaj Franck glassware and a painted platter by the trail-blazing Finnish brand Arabia. —Gareth Rice

IN THE BIGGEST EXPANSION since I. M. Pei's "sacrilegious" glass pyramids shocked Parisians in 1989, this fall the Louvre opens the sparkling **new Islamic Arts wing**. Algerian-born French architect Rudy Ricciotti and his Italian colleague Mario Bellini designed a three-level, partially underground gallery veiled with an undulating glass roof, located to the right of the now beloved pyramids' main entrance in the Visconti courtyard. Layered with gold- and silver-hued wire mesh to shade its precious charges, the building evokes everything from a sand dune or golden cloud (claim the architects) to a "magic flying carpet" (reportedly says Saudi prince and project funder Alwaleed Bin Talal). Inside, some 3,000 displayed objets d'art illustrate 1,300 years of history, pulled from the Louvre's Islamic collection of 18,000 items. Highlights include the sumptuous "Mantes" carpet, a Persian knotted rug from the late 16th or early 17th century; the sculpted ivory "Pyxis of al-Mughira" casket (dating to 968 Spain); and "Dish With a Peacock" from the Louvre's prestigious cache of blue-and-white Iznik ceramics.

The new wing makes a dramatic statement as cultural barometer amid France's increasing Muslim population, also offering a "reminder of how ancient and fascinating the roots of Islam are, and of how artistically rich they are, too," notes Isabelle Mayault, a Parisian journalist who covers the Mideast. Together with L'Institut du Monde Arabe—another architectural stunner showcasing Islamic art, located across the Seine in sight of the Cathedral of Notre Dame—the addition encourages French-Arab relations to further bend toward harmony. —AMY THOMAS

On display in the Louvre's new Islamic wing and inlaid with precious metals, the "Baptistère de St. Louis" depicts emirs, heraldic animals, and fleurs-de-lis.



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THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Northern Mitte, Berlin



WHEN THE BERLIN Wall divided the German capital in half 51 years ago, few places in the city were as hard hit as the borderline neighborhood around Brunnenstrasse and Torstrasse. Escape attempts from the apartment buildings that overlooked the border became so common that people had to have special passes just to visit. Locals abandoned the area in droves. It's taken a while, but in the past few years the prewar buildings and narrow streets of what is known as **northern Mitte** have come alive again. Says Ilse-Dorrie Gissler, a former East Berliner

who volunteers at the Berlin Wall Memorial, "No other city reinvents itself like Berlin."

Berlin Wall Memorial (1) A lively, compact museum tells the story of the Wall with maps, photography, and film clips of the Wall's early days. An observation tower gives a bird's-eye view of a preserved segment of the infamous "Death Strip" as well as the skyline of the reunited city.

Alpenstueck (2) In a neighborhood not yet widely known for its cuisine, a spate of restaurants—several within blocks of the former border—buck the trend, including this eatery, which uses local ingredients such as asparagus from Brandenburg on a menu heavy with southern German and Austrian classics (Wiener schnitzel, apple strudel).

DesignPanoptikum (3) Russian artist Vlad Korneev's space is part store, part art installation, displaying his collections of industrial machines and household items. Half of the stuff is for

sale; the rest, set aside in the "Museum of Absurd Objects," is for you to puzzle over.

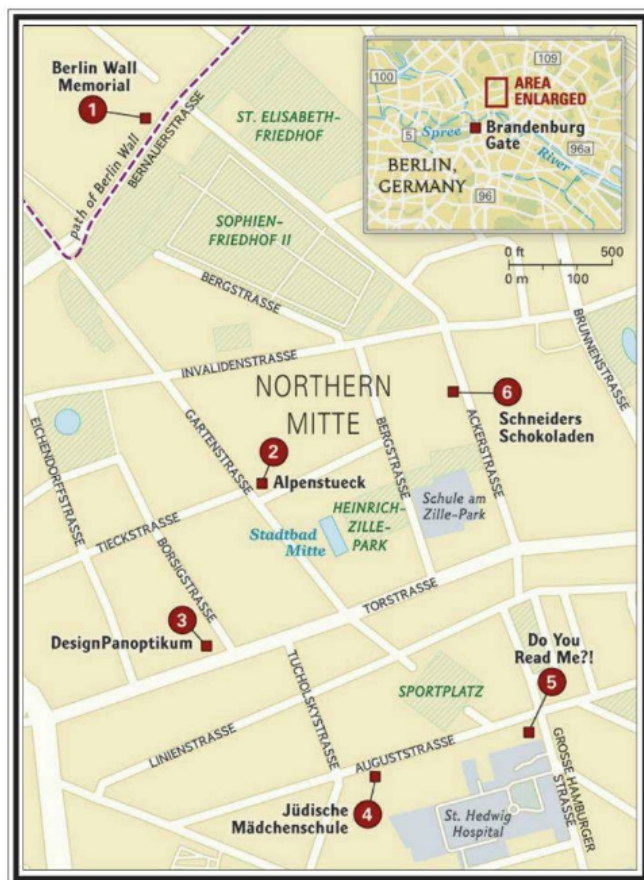
Jüdische Mädchenschule (4) In 1942, this former Jewish girls school was closed by the Nazis, who briefly used it as a military hospital. In February of this year it was resurrected as a cultural space, anchored by restaurant Pauly Saal in what was once the gymnasium, with a kosher kitchen



and a deli on the ground floor and exhibition spaces for photography and contemporary art in the upstairs classrooms.

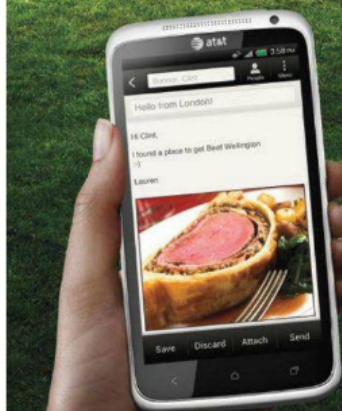
Do You Read Me?! (5) The art crowd heads to this magazine store for reading material. Everything from architecture digests to one-off fashion zines lines the walls, and staff will help compile a list of titles just for you.

Schneiders Schokoladen (6) Owner Klaus Schneider makes small-batch gourmet candy bars (including vegan dark chocolate options), cakes, and drinking chocolate. In summer, he stocks frozen treats from a local ice-cream maker. —Andrew Curry



Berlin beat (clockwise from top): Alpenstueck's roasted trout, the Berlin Wall Memorial, art at the Jüdische Mädchenschule.

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DAISANN McLANE

Truth Without Consequences

IN A HALF WHISPER, though no one else is around to hear us, Neung tells me, “The reason I’m not married is because I don’t like men—I like ladies.” I almost gasp, not because I’m shocked by what she has revealed, but because she revealed it to me, a stranger. ¶ I only met Neung a couple of days ago, when I began coming to this Internet café on the island of Koh Samui, Thailand, to check e-mail. Neung sits at the front desk of the shop. Today, as she hands me pieces of paper with the day’s password and counts out 10 baht coins in change, we’ve been covering all of the usual topics familiar to travelers and to the locals who make their living from them. Where do I come from, do I like

Thailand, am I traveling by myself and doesn’t that get lonely? I like to chat—especially when I’m on the road—and Neung’s English is pretty good, so I had asked her questions off the script. I’d found out that she is 25 years old, plays the guitar, loves American pop music, takes a university course at night, and still lives at home with her family.

Now there’s an awkward silence on my end as I ponder how to respond to her candor. I have no idea how Neung and I swerved so quickly from “I like Joni Mitchell songs” to “I like ladies.” And while this situation feels awkward to me, it’s also familiar: This is not the first time a conversation with someone I’ve just met while traveling has taken a sharp left turn into intimate territory.

There was, for instance, Mr. Sithan, the manager of the cheap hotel in Siem Reap, Cambodia, where I stayed when I visited the Angkor Wat temple complex. Returning late one evening after a sensory-overloaded day of ancient Khmer architecture, I found him sitting alone and pensive on the faded couch in the lobby. So I smiled and said hello. An hour later, I was fighting back tears as he finished telling me how he carried his 5-year-old daughter on his back across the Cambodian border into Thailand when fleeing the communist Khmer Rouge.

More than 12 years later I remember that lobby and Mr. Sithan’s matter-of-fact rendering of human horror more vividly than any of

the dancing *apsara* figures on Angkor’s temples. Just as one of my deepest memories of Udaipur, India, is not its much photographed lake but the heart-to-heart I had there with Priya, a dance instructor, who was living a Shakespearean drama: She had a boyfriend she e-mailed constantly but kept hidden from her parents because he was not from the same religion as her family. “We love each other, but we will both marry someone else. That is the way it is.”

The first time I found myself far from home and on the receiving end of some stranger’s confessional, I didn’t like it much: I was on the road to travel, not be a global amateur therapist. I also worried that there was something about me, about my personality, that encouraged people I met to break the boundaries of privacy. Maybe I projected too much vulnerability—not a great thing if you are traveling alone in unfamiliar places.

Gradually, though, I realized that the reason hotel clerks spill the beans about their recent face-lifts and taxi drivers confess about their mistresses didn’t have anything to do with me personally; it had everything to do with the role that we inhabit as travelers out in the world. Travelers are just passing through, which makes it a good bet that any secrets entrusted to us will safely leave town when we do. Strangers on a train, and all that.

My anonymity, however, cannot explain the intensity and depth of the travel encounters I’ve had with secret sharers. It took me many journeys, and years, to understand what really was going on. I finally had the lightbulb moment one evening in Qatar at the end of a long dinner with friends of friends. Sitting on the floor, reaching for another handful of rice pilaf from the communal dish, I was very aware of being the lone woman in a group of men whose wives stayed at home, because it is the Qatari custom for the sexes to remain separate on social occasions. Yet those customs didn’t apply to me. I was, at least temporarily, and for the occasion, exempt from local

taboos. My role as a traveler, as a distant other, trumped everything else about me, even my femaleness.

Being a traveler gives us a big pass: We can move freely through other cultures without getting enmeshed in, and restricted by, their traditions and rules. No wonder we’re a magnet for the confidences of strangers. Every society comes with its own particular set of expectations, but as an outsider from a different culture I’m not going to have them (or, at least, the same ones), which makes me a very appealing ear for someone aching to talk about emotional or deeply personal things without feeling judged.

The chance to be a secret sharer is a great gift, and I try my best to remember to honor the privilege even when it materializes, as it often does, without warning. A door opens, along with a heart and a hope, and suddenly it’s just you and the half whisper of a stranger in an Internet café.

“In my country,” I say, smiling, to Neung, “I have lots of girlfriends who like ladies too. Do you have a girlfriend? Tell me more.” ■



Culture klatch: An Aborigine bends a visitor's ear.

DAISANN McLANE divides her time between New York and Hong Kong. Follow her on Twitter, @Daisann_McLane.



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CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT

Got a Beef? Don't Count on a Tweet

WHEN THE LIFTGATE on his late-model Ford Explorer cracked, Gary Brewer did everything he could to repair it quickly. He phoned the dealer to find out if the apparent defect was under warranty. It wasn't. Finally, he spent \$987 to replace the part. Brewer, who often drives from Tifton, Georgia, to

Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, for family vacations, was worried the damaged part might make the car unsafe for his family. In a post on Ford Social, an online network run by the auto company, he detailed his efforts to fix the vehicle and his frustrations with the workmanship. ¶ A few hours later, Brewer

received a message that Ford would not be posting his missive. "This is not the best place for you to ask questions about your vehicle or dealership experience," the message read. "They censored me," notes Brewer.

That's not how social media was supposed to work. Just five short years ago, people believed sites such as Facebook and Twitter might help change the world, one status update or tweet at a time. For travelers, that meant that the power of the Internet could be leveraged, helping us get better service as we shared our experiences with others online. Web 2.0, as it was called, would be the great equalizer.

Now that almost every travel company is involved in social media (in 2011 EyeforTravel found 100 percent of travel companies surveyed used Facebook and three out of four were on Twitter), the results aren't what anyone expected. Sure, for a select few with lots of followers and stellar Klout scores (a measure of your influence in the social media world), using social media as a megaphone works. Travel companies pay close attention and offer better service to these übercitizens of the Internet, or risk a public shaming.

The rest of us? Not so much. Ford says it isn't squelching comments like Brewer's on its site. Ford Social "is meant to be one of shared stories and ideas from people who enjoy Ford products and want to hear more from Ford Motor Company," says Scott Monty, global head of social media at the company. I guess Ford doesn't

want anyone to "go further" than that, despite the company's tagline. Monty adds that taking online complaints could cause the car manufacturer to run afoul of federal law, specifically the TREAD Act, which regulates how complaints are handled. Result: a social network that contains largely positive posts about the company. My, how *convenient* for Ford.

But it is hardly the only company using social media as a promotional tool. JetBlue famously tweeted out news of a ticket giveaway in 2010, drawing a throng online and, later, offline in several Manhattan locations. Last year, Wyndham used Facebook to solicit customers' funniest "tiny hotel" room stories. It was an opportunity to give away rooms and talk about how spacious its resort accommodations were.

Social sites are an attractive medium for companies because you're in there interacting with your friends, says Lorraine Sileo of PhoCusWright, a travel research company. "Social media allows advertising messages to at least seem more authentic because of the active input of the user," she says.

Yet most corporations have never been comfortable with this freewheeling way of communication. When I post something on my consumer advocacy blog, which I do almost every morning, I often call out a company I've written about. On Facebook and Twitter, you can do that by adding the @ symbol in front of the company name. The post usually shows up on the company's page, although a company can remove the link from its site. In many cases, the critical post will vanish after I publish the story. No one likes to be criticized. I'm reminded of Jennifer Shin of Los Angeles, who tried to help her father after he suffered a knee injury before a US Airways flight. She wanted the airline to cover his medical expenses and refund his ticket. She put a comment on the airline's Facebook page. It promptly deleted her post. So she started a new Facebook page in which



A pen can sometimes be mightier than a tweet.

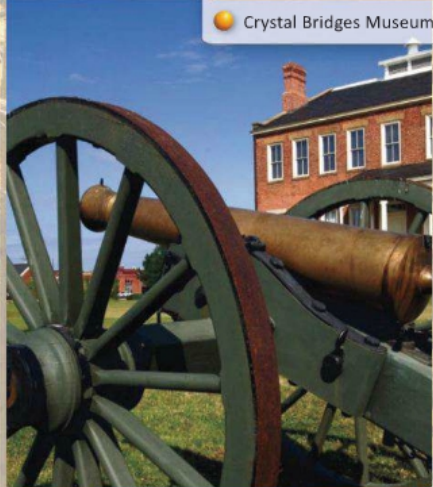
she encouraged users to boycott US Airways. So, maybe corporations can't control everything you say online—yet.

So if social media isn't a magic bullet, what works? In addition to having a legitimate grievance, travelers should know that there are no shortcuts to getting better service. As a rule, polite and considerate passengers are treated better than angry, arrogant ones. But what if you booked an ocean-view room and got only a pool view? Or your business-class seat morphed into an economy-class reservation? If you're still on your trip, talk to a supervisor; often, managers are empowered to make a fix. Nothing is better than a real conversation, in real time and real life. If you're back home, put your grievance in writing, with a brief e-mail or letter (yep, those still work), and rely on the system—not a social network—for a resolution. Go another round, and if that fails, contact me. I'm on Twitter and Facebook, and unlike the companies that believe they've tamed the socialsphere, I answer every message. Maybe I'm idealistic, but I still hope Web 2.0 can be a two-way street. ■

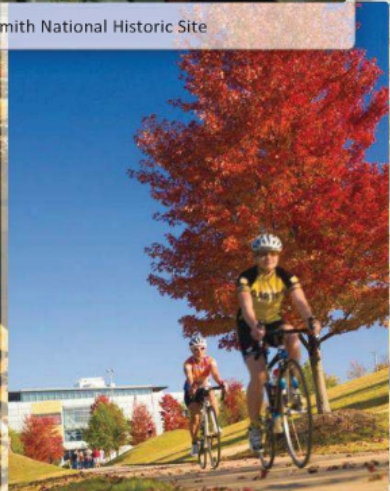
CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT writes about consumer travel issues and helps readers fix their trips. E-mail him at celliott@ngs.org.



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*Happy Talk
in Bhutan*

FROM A FOREST of wild rhododendrons, a cool wind greets me, bringing the wails of Tibetan horns and the chants of monks drifting from the ancient monastery in Phobjikha Valley below. Like the rest of Bhutan, this valley remained mostly isolated from the outside world until barely two decades ago, when a tourist quota system that permitted only a trickle of visitors was lifted. Ever since, Western travelers have rushed in to embrace the last remaining Himalayan Buddhist kingdom as a modern day Shangri-la (a utopian image the Bhutanese do not share). ¶ Bhutan was first thrust into the world spotlight back in the 1970s when the king, Jigme Singye

Wangchuck, announced that his country would abandon the materialistic metric of gross national product (GNP) as a measure of development success and replace it with its own model, Gross National Happiness (GNH). Though some media reports sniggered at the concept, Bhutan not only reaffirmed its belief in GNH as the right path for its kingdom but has recently notched it up. It is calling upon the rest of the world to adopt a new global economic paradigm in which well-being and happiness are also counted when measuring a country's progress.

"The present GNP development model no longer makes economic sense because it compels boundless growth on a planet with limited resources," Bhutan's prime minister, Jigmi Y. Thinley, told more than 600 attendees gathered at the United Nations headquarters in New York last April. I was among them, and I decided to see for myself if GNH really is a viable prescription for our troubled world or just a one-off experiment suited only to a country that has never been colonized and has a largely homogeneous culture.

In Thimphu, Bhutan's miniature-size capital and home to the current king, I met with Dasho Sangay Wangchuk, a member of the royal family. "What we mean by GNH is striking a balance between the material, the emotional, and the spiritual well-being of our people. It is based on four guiding principles: equitable economic growth, preservation of cultural heritage, protecting the

environment, and good governance," he told me. I realized that the Bhutanese definition of "happiness" goes far beyond the widespread and more prosaic understanding of the word as a passing mood.

The country has developed 72 indicators to measure its GNH, from free healthcare access, to education for girls, to sustainable agriculture that enhances biodiversity. The prime minister has appointed a director of GNH to monitor progress. Nobel laureates, prominent scientists, and some of the world's leading economists have endorsed Bhutan's efforts to define a new global paradigm, and the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted Bhutan's resolution, "Happiness: Towards a Holistic Approach to Development." Not bad for a country of 700,000 people. So what's not to like?

Well, for one thing, Bhutan hasn't actually achieved the visionary goals it is prescribing for the rest of the world. It faced international criticism for the forced exile of some 100,000 Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese origin back in the 1990s. The most recent national survey to measure GNH, conducted in 2010, revealed that only 41 percent of Bhutanese were classified as happy. Alcohol abuse is a rising health problem, and there are concerns about business corruption (albeit small-scale). Though not actively enforced, a national decree requires all Bhutanese to wear traditional dress (hand-

woven *kiras* for women and *ghos* for men); meanwhile, a new generation of youth clamors for Western fashions and iPhones. Bhutan, which did not have a single international hotel ten years ago, plans to open the country to more tourists—from 64,000 last year to 150,000 annually by 2015.

The Bhutanese admit that there is some disconnect between what is taking place and their intention to create a happy and more sustainable society: "We need to do a better job of getting our own house in order, including clearer guidelines for tourism's expansion," says Karma Tshering of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. Whether more tourism will be good or bad for Bhutan

remains to be seen. The changes, like the rest of the country's development efforts, will be measured against GNH standards.

Despite the contradictions, I did not encounter one citizen who questioned GNH as the right path for the country and perhaps for the rest of the world. It would be overly simplistic to conclude that Bhutan is not doing enough to walk its talk. More than 50 percent of the country, home to some of the world's rarest species, including snow leopards, tigers, and one-horned rhinos, is protected as national parks and reserves. Ninety-nine percent of the children are in school. Women are empowered both in business and in their communities. And Bhutan voluntarily became a constitutional democracy, with its first elections held in 2008.

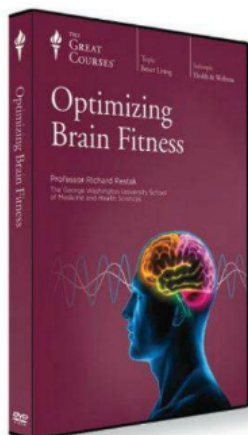
And there is something else, something ineffable but powerful. There was a feeling I got in that little country I have not felt in the other 130 countries I have visited. Something deep, meaningful, even transformative is happening there. Not happiness, exactly, but whatever it is, it just might change the world. ■



Brother and sister in Bhutan's Phobjikha Valley.

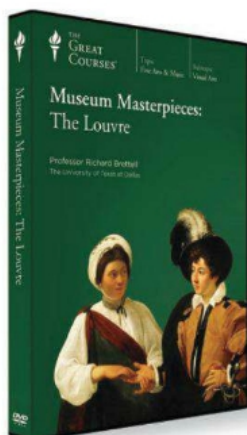


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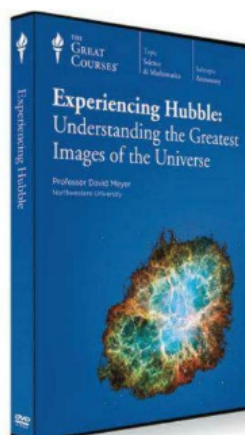
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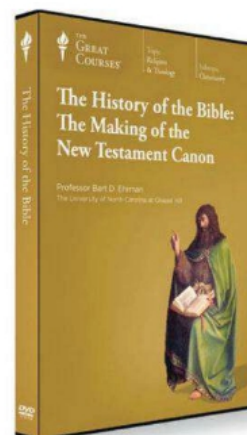
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SYDNEY'S NOT-SO-SECRET INGREDIENT? YOU'LL FIND IT AT THE HARBOR

By PETER TURNER

FROM COLONIAL MANSIONS to glass-walled brasseries, prime real estate rims Sydney Harbour, all competing for a glimpse of the water. Capital of the Australian state of New South Wales and a major Pacific hub riding the Asian boom, Sydney seems recession-proof. The redevelopment of the old wharves continues to transform the waterfront while still ensuring historic districts retain their character. "Sydney is a modern city with an ancient heartbeat," says city historian Lisa Murray. "The Eora, Sydney's first peoples, enjoyed the harbor lifestyle for thousands of years, and Sydney is still defined by its harbor and rivers."

WHAT TO DO The city's focus remains **Circular Quay**, landing site for the convict-laden vessels from Britain, which founded the penal colony in 1788. From the busy terminal, ferries come and go under the **Sydney Harbour Bridge** or around the **Sydney Opera House**. Grand plans to revamp the venerable Opera House are in the works, but new dining venues, such as the outdoor Opera Bar, are already breathing new life into the precinct.

On the other bank of Circular Quay, the **Museum of Contemporary Art** reopened in March after adding a new wing. The resulting streamlined spaces flanked by harbor-view windows host exhibitions

by Australian notables (sculptor Stephen Birch, neon artist Peter Kennedy) as well as global art stars (Annie Leibovitz, Anish Kapoor).

Behind the museum lies the **Rocks**, early Sydney's center. "It was Sydney's most cosmopolitan place in the 19th century, a working district which welcomed, and also at times abused, the ships and sailors of the world," says Murray. Press gangs would kidnap hapless sailors along the Rocks' cobbled alleys, where visitors on weekends now shop for boomerangs and other Australian-made products at the **Rocks Markets** and spice blends and hand-pressed olive oils at the new Fridays-only **Foodies Market**. So-called



A prime location near Circular Quay with views of Sydney Harbour Bridge has made the Opera Bar a hot spot for sunset drinks.

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bond stores once stocked with brandy, tobacco, tea, and flour currently house art galleries, boutiques, restaurants, and watering holes such as the **Argyle**, the epicenter of nightlife in the Rocks, with its multiple bars and live music.

Bordering the Rocks to the north, the old commerce-focused wharves of **Walsh Bay** have become the city's arts hub. At Wharf 4/5, the Sydney Theatre Company produces new Australian plays and classic works under the artistic guidance of Cate Blanchett, while the contemporary Sydney Dance Company runs drop-in ballet, jazz, and hip-hop classes.

The waterfront rejuvenation began at **Darling Harbour**, where a host of attractions include an 1874 tall ship, one of only four of its kind in the world and on permanent display as part of the Maritime Museum. Go for a last ride on the iconic monorail that loops from Darling Harbour to the city center, destined to be torn down in the next year or two and turned into scrap metal—a government decision that shocked the city.

But taking to the water remains the best way to appreciate the harbor. Catch a ferry from Circular Quay to **Cockatoo Island**, Sydney's new favorite harbor island since the former prison and dockyards opened to the public. Tour the heritage buildings, attend a concert or art exhibition, or join the sunset hubbub at the Island Bar, which is constructed from recycled shipping containers.

Alternatively, the classic ferry ride to the famous surf beach at **Manly** cruises the length of Sydney Harbour before docking at Manly Wharf. Swim, sign up for a surfing lesson, or leave the crowds and rent a kayak next to the wharf. Paddle around Manly Cove's forested headlands to the secluded inlets and sheltered beaches of Sydney Harbour National Park. Landlubbers can hike the Manly Scenic Walkway. The national park also contains the historic buildings of Q Station, an old quarantine outpost that once cloistered passengers from contagion-hit ships, now a boutique hotel and a popular venue for weddings and conferences.

WHERE TO SHOP For indie shopping, wander the Victorian streetscapes of inner suburbs Paddington, Woollahra, Newtown, and Surry Hills. Saturday's **Paddington Markets** has been in operation for the past 37 years. Vendors hawk everything from watercolor paintings and antique silverware to little girl dresses in eucalyptus print fabric. Many of the designers graduate to the boutiques spread out along Paddington's Oxford Street, such as **Dinosaur Designs**, makers of hand-sculpted jewelry. Local fashion labels like **Neil Grigg Millinery** and **Jiva** reside on adjoining William Street.

In Surry Hills, **Grandma Takes a Trip** stocks

vintage dresses, coats, and accessories from the 1950s to the '70s.

Though a long way from the outback, Sydney has plenty of Aboriginal art galleries selling classical dot paintings and contemporary works. The **Artery** in Darlinghurst specializes in art from such remote Aboriginal communities as Utopia, Mount Leibig, and Pupunya in the Northern Territory, and **Kate Owen Gallery** in Rozelle features emerging and established artists, including Clifford Possum, whose larger dot canvases set auction records at Sotheby's.

WHERE TO EAT The food truck scene has finally hit Sydney as the city recently

outlets from some of Sydney's best known gastronomic brands to form the fanciest food court in town. The *wagyu* burgers may be a tad expensive, but the harbor views are priceless. Highlights include the sushi bar at Kenji, the plank-roasted king salmon at Cloudy Bay Fish Company, and tiger prawn and green mango rice paper rolls at Misschu.

Gastro Park in Kings Cross has set local foodies a-buzz since opening last year. The dining room's clean lines frame the innovative, intricately styled food, which is anything but casual. Grant King, former executive chef at the seafood-inspired Pier restaurant, produces such playful and



Founded in 1816, the Royal Botanic Gardens provide 74 acres of green oasis.

approved ten new mobile vendors. Find organic spelt pizzas, gourmet fish tacos, hot chocolate cakes, and more rolling out to fill late-night dining voids in locations like Circular Quay and Pitt Street Mall. The **Eat Art Truck** serves kingfish sevice and doubles as a street art canvas. The granddaddy of Sydney food trucks, **Harry's Cafe de Wheels** has sold meat pies smothered in peas and gravy, a unique local offering, since 1945. It sits incongruously adjacent to Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf, now one of the city's most exclusive residential and dining complexes.

The **Opera Kitchen** at the Opera House has hit on a winning formula: Combine

adventurous dishes as snapper fillet topped with crunchy fried fish scales.

Sydney has no shortage of waterfront dining, but it's worth the trip to Bondi for Italian-inspired dishes at **Icebergs Dining Room and Bar**, on the top floor of the famed swimming club at the end of the beach. A favorite: Berkshire pork cutlet with grilled radicchio.

For the more price-conscious, Chinatown offers other cuisines beyond Cantonese. At **Mamak**, Malaysian chefs twirl and stretch dough into giant paper-thin sails before folding and slapping them onto the griddle. The ensuing crisp, flaky roti bread is perfect for dipping in rich coconut curries. ■

*Splashing steed:
Horseback riders
travel through
Jamaica's clear
turquoise sea
during a guided
tour near MoBay.*

Montego Bay High

OFF-THE-SHIP EXCURSIONS IN THE EASYGOING ISLAND OF JAMAICA

By EVERETT POTTER

MONTEGO BAY CAN seem like a Caribbean cliché, a reggae-fueled beach scene filled with hawkers selling trinkets that no one needs. But beyond hair braiders and Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville bar lies the true Jamaica, a country currently celebrating its 50th year of independence.

WALK AND DON'T LOOK BACK Stroll down Gloucester Avenue, aka Hip Strip, just to sample the energy and music coming out of the restaurants and bars lining one of the Caribbean's most famous streets. At the end of Gloucester Avenue, the **Old Fort Craft Market** has dozens of vendors selling straw hats and beaded jewelry. Then get a dose of local history. **Sam Sharpe Square** commemorates the man who led the Christmas Rebellion of 1831 (he was hanged here), which spurred the freeing of Jamaica's slaves in 1838. In one corner of the square is the Cage, an early 19th-century jail for slaves and rogue British sailors. If you're

staying in MoBay for dinner, take a ferry to the **HouseBoat Grill**, a funky barge floating in the Marine Park Fish Sanctuary. Dine on Westmoreland pepper shrimp and grilled local mahimahi on the deck. (4 hours)

BEST BEACHES You may want to do nothing more than rent a chair and an umbrella on a beach and soak up the sun. But choose your strand wisely. **Doctors Cave Beach**—a 300-yard stretch of white sand—is the most famous but can be crowded with fellow cruise passengers. For a more tranquil scene, consider **Cornwall Beach**, or take a 45-minute taxi ride (a licensed Jamaica Union of Travelers Association taxi is recommended) to **My Time N Place**, east of Falmouth. This is a beach shack bar (and cottages) where Red Stripe and reggae accompany an uncrowded shore. (3 hours)

FULL OF ZIP Jamaica offers plenty of wild country, and it's best discovered with an island outfitter such as **Chukka Caribbean Adventures**. The Ultimate Kayak and

Zipline Canopy Combo pairs white-water kayaking with zip lining as a 2.5-hour trip. You paddle two miles of the Great River, hike to a hidden platform, and then go airborne for a brush with the forest canopy. Celebrate by heading back to MoBay and stopping at **Scotchies**, the gold standard of tangy jerk pork and chicken. "Scotchies maintains authenticity by using spices only found on the island and slow-cooking their jerk over pimento wood," says renowned Jamaican chef Nigel Spence. (5 hours)

OPEN HOUSE There were dozens of colonial plantation mansions across Jamaica at one time, built on sugar estates. Hire a taxi for a self-guided tour. Begin at **Rose Hall Great House**, a Georgian mansion built in 1770 said to be haunted. Nearby, the **Greenwood Great House**, home to the family of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, features antique musical instruments and vintage carriages. **Bellefield Great House and Gardens** is another gem, with restored formal English gardens and sugarcane. (6 hours) ■

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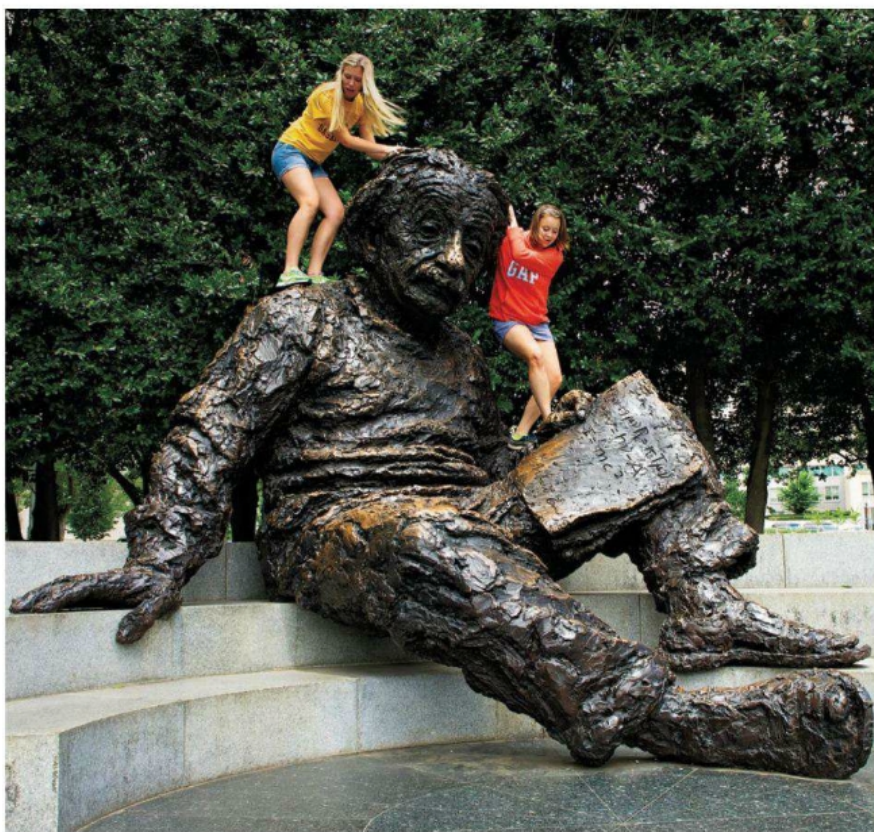
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Teens climb on the 12-foot bronze statue of Albert Einstein, sculpted by Robert Berks.

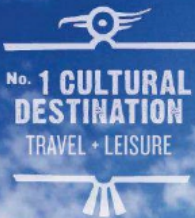
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Cavallo Point Lodge, on the grounds of historic Fort Baker, offers guest rooms with views of San Francisco Bay.

Bay Area Bliss

THREE SAN FRANCISCO INNS WITHIN NATIONAL PARKLANDS

By DON GEORGE

FEW PEOPLE REALIZE that artsy, foodie San Francisco is also home to nine national parks. With the opening last spring of a renovated inn in the city's historic Presidio, travelers now have the option of staying in three comfortable lodgings located on national parklands, combining history and nature with the city's urban pleasures and lively neighborhoods.

POSH POST The **Inn at the Presidio**, situated within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, welcomed its first guests in April. Formerly the bachelor officers' quarters on the 236-year-old Presidio Army post, the 1903 Georgian Revival-style Pershing Hall was transformed via an \$11 million renovation into a charming redbrick inn comprising 17 suites and 5 guest rooms. Surrounded by eucalyptus and pine trees and framed

in front by a two-story porch with rocking chairs, the inn features soothing views of the post's red-shingled buildings and lush lawns. Some top-floor suites also have bay-scapes of the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz, and Angel Island. The 1,490-acre Presidio, which was decommissioned in 1994, offers several biking and hiking choices. Be sure to walk Lovers' Lane, the Presidio's oldest foot trail and originally the path that officers used to get to and from town. Also enticing are the early drawings of Mickey Mouse at the Disney Family Museum, the bayside beauties of Baker Beach and Crissy Field (a former airfield), and 12 cafés and restaurants, including Michelin-starred chef Joseph Humphrey's new Dixie restaurant. Staying at the inn immerses travelers in a unique San Francisco neighborhood: part wilderness; part residential area, where seniors stride beside dog walkers; and part

business space for Internet start-ups, environmental organizations, preschools, and the Lucasfilm empire. (Don't miss the Yoda statue.) From \$195.

NAUTICAL BERTHS Located among the sweatshirt and seafood purveyors at the western end of Fisherman's Wharf, the **Argonaut Hotel** is housed in a 1907 four-story brick warehouse that is now part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. Established in 1978, the park includes a visitors center next to the hotel that re-creates San Francisco's waterfront history and has a fleet of historic vessels moored across the street at the Hyde Street Pier; most majestic is the *Balclutha*, a three-masted, square-rigged sailing ship that dates from 1886. The Argonaut reprises the nautical theme in its 252 blue-and-white guest rooms and suites, many

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Bugles displayed on the wall at the Presidio Inn date from 1861 to WWII and include two horns from the Civil War.

of which artfully incorporate the warehouse's original exposed brick walls, timbers, and steel doors and offer views of the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco Bay, as well as landmarks such as Coit Tower and the Transamerica Pyramid. For history buffs and waterfront wanderers, the location is inspiring. "Just as in the early 1900s," says David von Winckler, the hotel's general manager, "there are still fishermen who dock their boats at the wharf after an early morning at sea. Wake up by 7 a.m. and walk toward the pier. Along with eager herons and egrets, you can watch these fishermen returning with their catch." And later you can eat that fresh catch in the hotel's Blue Mermaid Chowder House & Bar. From \$175.

URBAN RETREAT Cavallo Point Lodge seems a world apart, exuding harmony with the hillside landscape. Located at the Marin County end of the Golden Gate Bridge (within the national recreation area) on a 1905 military post set at the foot of the bridge's northern tower, this rambling resort opened in 2008 after an extensive renovation. Today, 142 guest rooms are divided between turn-of-the-century officers' houses and newly constructed lodgings. Hiking, biking, and kayaking options abound here, along with cooking (the hotel offers special room rates for guests who sign up for cooking classes) and yoga classes and a Healing Arts Center & Spa. Murray Circle restaurant serves up local Dungeness crab (in season), Marin Sun Farm's grass-fed beef, Petaluma chicken, and cheeses from Point Reyes's Cowgirl Creamery. But one of the resort's prime pleasures is simply rocking on the porch, breathing in the eucalyptus, and watching the colors of the bridge and the bay turn with the day. Dusk is especially magical from the resort's waterfront, as stars pricking the twilight seem to mirror the lights twinkling in the city across the bay. From \$265. ■

Low Country Eats

BOAT-TO-PLATE SHRIMP IN SOUTH CAROLINA

FRIENDS DON'T LET friends eat imported shrimp, declares the ubiquitous bumper sticker in coastal South Carolina, where the shrimping industry is threatened by cheap farm-raised imports. One bite of the native crustaceans and you'll know why. They're sweet, briny, and firm, but they rarely make it beyond local seafood purveyors. To eat fresh Carolina shrimp, you have to come during shrimping season, which runs from May to December. Buy directly from the trawlers that line **Shem Creek** in the old town of Mount Pleasant, or sit down to a feast a few steps away at the **Wreck of Richard and Charlene**, an unmarked restaurant that rose up on the docks where Hurricane Hugo upended a fishing boat. Just look for the red buoy, and be prepared to wait. Your reward is a sunset view of the marshland, peanuts to snack on, and the tasty crustacean—fried, grilled, or boiled. "Shrimp is so much a part of this culture," says Cindy Tarvin, whose family owns the shrimping boat *Miss Paula* at the Geechee Dock. "Folks like to see working boats in the water and know that the tradition survives." Farther south beyond the Charleston Peninsula, locals dig into Frogmore stew, a one-pot wonder of unpeeled shrimp, corn on the cob, potatoes, and sausage at **Bowens Island Restaurant**, a third-generation-owned shrimp shack on the banks of Folly Creek. —MARGARET LOFTUS



Bowens Island Restaurant serves Frogmore stew, a traditional Low Country meal.

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Photo: Michael Mauro

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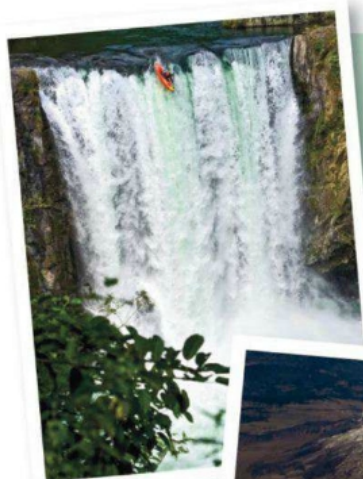
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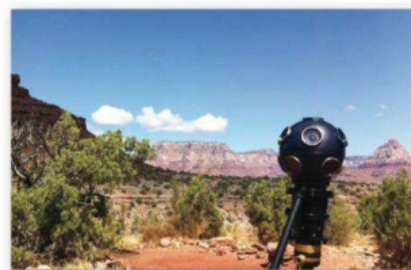
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Horses and tepees evoke Washington's rural heritage at Cherry Wood Bed Breakfast and Barn in Zillah.

Northwestern Exposure

A WILD RIDE IN WASHINGTON BEARS RICH FRUIT—
VOLCANOES, VINEYARDS, AND OLD WEST LORE

By FRED A MOON
Photographs by SUSAN SEUBERT

WASHINGTON'S INTERIOR, with its dramatic mountain passes and low-slung Main Streets, has the exaggerated beauty of a Western film set. It has the

history, too—the booms and busts, the rail heists, the violence of westward expansion. That Old West history sets the scene for a driving route traveling from the railway hub of Centralia, past the snowmelt lakes of the Cascades, and ending in the tumbleweed towns of the Yakima Valley, with 300 sunny days a year. A hundred-some miles from drizzly Seattle, the Yakima was once a dust bowl, but crisscrossing canals now hydrate rows of Fuji apple trees, V-shaped trellises of hops (the fragrant seed cones that flavor beer), and grape vines at 70-plus wineries. “When you cross the Cascades, it’s 20 or 25 degrees warmer—people come over just to enjoy the sunshine,” says Jill Johnson of Yakima’s 108-year-old Johnson Orchards. Such farms feed locavore Northwestern tastes, and in 2013 the valley celebrates its 30th anniversary as Washington’s oldest wine region. October is harvest time: The vines are stripped, the grapes are crushed, and a party spirit sweeps the region.

Before the Yakima flourished as Washington’s wine country, its volcanic soil was known for its sweet apples. The fruit even carries a creation myth; the seeds are said to have come to Washington in 1826 in the pocket of a Hudson’s Bay Company supervisor. At a London party, a woman had playfully presented the seeds with instructions: Plant them in the wilderness of the West.



A roadside stand near Yakima.



Between the foothills of the Cascades and the cliffs of the Rattlesnake Hills, once desertlike



DETAILS

Distance: 202 miles, Centralia to Prosser **When to go:** September/October **Tip:** BYOB—bring



Yakima Valley benefits from canals.

The 1883 completion of the Northern Pacific Railway connected Yakima's apples, cherries, and pears to the Northwest's young and hungry cities. **Centralia**—the midpoint between Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington—became the state's "hub city," a quintessential Western railroad boomtown. It's also the ideal starting point for a drive through rural central Washington.

In 1912, Northern Pacific built the grand **Union Depot**; two years later, Centralia hummed with 44 passenger and 17 freight trains daily. Loggers, miners, and railroad workers crowded the brick station's dark oak benches, its walls stenciled with admonishments against spitting. A century later, Amtrak serves the depot. Next door, the opulent **Olympic Club Hotel and Theater** is a 27-room railroad hotel with a movie theater and pool hall. Legend holds that Roy Gardner, the notorious "Gentleman Train Robber," was captured here in

1921 while posing as a burn victim in one of the hotel's prostitute-frequented rooms. Now owned by the quirky Portland-based brewpub chain McMenamins, the hotel's mahogany bar stays true to its past with a massive antique cash register and a wood-burning fireplace.

Starting south of town eastbound, the **White Pass Scenic Byway** (Route 12; see below) skirts the banks of the Cowlitz River, teeming with trout and salmon, and crosses the Cowlitz Valley elk habitat as well as the Pacific Crest Trail on its long, lonely passage between Canada and Mexico. Route 12 reaches 4,500 feet at White Pass and then winds between **Gifford Pinchot** and **Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forests**, a combined three million acres of Ponderosa pines and fragrant fir trees. The byway rides the north shore of **Rimrock Lake**, which was created by the 1925 construction of the Tieton Dam—at the time, the world's tallest



MORE TO EXPLORE

Taking the Scenic Route

The 124-mile **White Pass Scenic Byway** (Route 12) weaves through Washington's volcano country. Colorful fall—between mosquitoes and snow—is an ideal time to explore the region. Detours and outlooks are plentiful: (1) The **Cowlitz Salmon Hatchery** raises 11 million of the downstream-swimming fish per year; its new visitors center teaches salmon survival skills with mazes and games. (2) Take State 131 seven miles to the **Woods Creek Wildlife Area** to hike trails populated by beavers and marsh wrens. (3) Pick wild huckleberries on side roads along a 20-mile detour to **Iron Creek Falls**. (4) Heading eastbound back on Route 12, turn on State 123 for the **Grove of the Patriarchs**, a thousand-year-old forest of red cedars and hemlocks accessed via a narrow suspension bridge. (5) Picnic at the **Palisades Viewpoint** for a dramatic panorama of a steep rock wall. (6) Continue to the **Mount Rainier-Goat Rocks Observation Site** to admire volcanic peaks and its horned namesake nibbling on the hillside. (7) After tracing Rimrock Lake's shore, learn the history of 321-foot **Tieton Dam**. (8) Begin your descent into the Yakima Valley at **Thompson's Farm**, with you-pick apples, pumpkins, and walnuts. October weekends, farmer John Thompson launches gourds up to a half mile from his famed cannons. —*Kelsey Snell*

earth-fill dam—which helps make possible the valley's 172,000 acres of orchards. On clear days, the imposing peaks of **St. Helens**, **Adams**, and **Rainier** appear in the distance. South of the byway is the ashen landscape created by the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens, a blast that flattened 200 square miles and left vast plains of pumice.

Finally, descend into the Yakima Valley, where the air is warm and dry and the palette shifts from mountain grays and greens to startling golds and deep reds. In fall, attention is fixed on the grape crush. At vineyards such as **Airfield Estates**, ripe fruit perfumes the air with a musty sweetness, bands play a live sound track, and bare feet dance in halved wine barrels, a ritualized stomp that sprays juice and stains toes.

Before delving into the valley's viticulture, detour north on **Canyon Road**—the snaking, two-lane Highway 821—following the Yakima River through 2,000-foot basalt cliffs, sage-covered desert, and the state's highest concentration of hawks, eagles, and falcons. The byway ends in **Ellensburg**, a proud cow town with a rodeo grandstand and an art walk on first Fridays.

Back in the city of Yakima, a resurgent downtown radiates from the **Capitol Theatre**. Its interior painted by muralist A. B. Heinsbergen, the 1,500-seat theater opened in 1920 as the Northwest's largest. South of town, the Yakama Indian Reservation is home to the 14 confederated bands and tribes of the Yakama (this spelling said to better reflect native pronunciation). Chief Kamiakin's story of 1850s resistance against American settlers is enlivened at the **Yakama Nation Museum and Cultural Center**, where visitors can also shop for

Pendleton blankets and try *luk-a-meen* (a stew of smoked salmon and dumplings).

Continue southeast to Prosser, where in 1937 scientist Walter Clore began a series of grape-growing trials. "Locals nicknamed him Johnny Grape Seed," says Kathy Corliss of the soon-to-break-ground Walter Clore Wine and Culinary Center. The valley now cultivates some 30 varietals, from Reisling to rare Graciano (a Spanish red). Rocky soils and lava flows characterize the appellation. "When you walk through the vineyards, you can see the deposits on the rocks," says Barbara Glover, executive director of the Wine Yakima Valley association. Start at Prosser's new **Vintner's Village**, with 13 tasting rooms within walking distance.

Similar to Clore's wine trials, current research fuels a growing beer culture. Near downtown Toppenish's 1911 depot turned **Northern Pacific Railway Museum** is a one-time creamery housing the **American Hop Museum**. Murals along its stucco walls show hop farmers in their fields; exhibits inside trace the Yakima Valley's history as the world's second largest hop-growing region (smaller only than Germany's Hallertau). Prosser brewer Gary Vegar works with experimental hops at his **Horse Heaven Hills Brewery** and participates in October's Fresh Hop Ale Festival in Yakima. "When we get the hops, sticks and leaves are still mixed in," Vegar says. The burgeoning scene is another example of the valley reinventing what historian W. D. Lyman called the desert's "destiny"—to become Washington's "great horticultural and orchard region."

Brooklyn-based writer FREDA MOON grew up road-tripping through the Pacific Northwest.

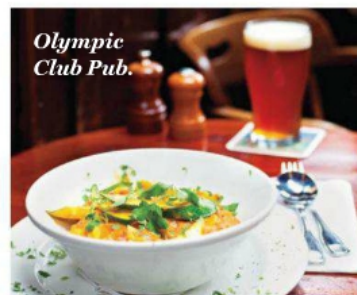


Off Route 12, Randle's Huff and Puff Drive-In offers burgers, malts, and local color.

EAT

Taste Testing

Along with feedstores and Western wear clothing shops, Ellensburg's compact downtown has one of central Washington's most lauded institutions, the art deco **Valley Café**. In business since the 1930s, the restaurant has a diner-style lunch counter with original mahogany stools. The sprawling menu ranges from the Pacific Rim (spicy Asian prawns in coconut broth) to the Old World (peppercorn-dusted beef tenderloin with blue-cheese butter), with an emphasis on



seasonal ingredients. But it's the exceptional list of regional wines that draws the biggest accolades, with 90 percent of the restaurant's 250 wines from Washington State. Among them are Merlots and Cabernets from Leonetti Cellar, some of the U.S.'s rarest and most prized wines. On the other end of the spectrum, burger shack **Huff and Puff Drive-In** tempts from along White Pass Scenic Byway and displays yellowing photos of the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. Back in Centralia, the **Olympic Club Pub** offers West African veggie bowls (above) and small-batch pear brandy accompanied by touring indie bands, while Prosser's **Wine o' Clock** in Vintner's Village has wood-fired "pizzettas" with garden herbs.

SLEEP

A Teepee With a View

Surrounded by neat rows of grape vines, Zillah's **Cherry Wood Bed Breakfast and Barn** puts guests up in teepees outfitted with down comforters, wood or stone slab floors, fire pits, and outdoor showers. During the day, guests join horseback trail rides through the vineyards on rehabilitated horses. The five-hour ride stops for a picnic lunch and tasting at Cultura winery, known for small-lot French reds. At night, draw a bath in a vintage clawfooted bathtub under the stars in a reed-walled, open-roofed enclosure. —F.M.



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Andrew Evans is National Geographic's digital nomad—always traveling and always wired. Explore the world with Andrew online or share in some of his recent Swiss adventures through these excerpts from his blog:

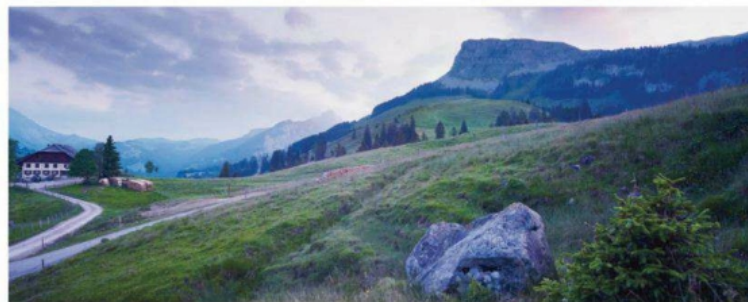
BASE JUMPING IN LAUTERBRUNNEN, SWITZERLAND

Lauterbrunnen is a dream destination for BASE jumpers. Official numbers suggest there are at

least 25,000 jumps per year in this valley (unofficial estimates peg it closer to 35,000). The jumpers come from all over the world and they form a rather strange and close-knit brotherhood.

"Everyone shares this air space," explains Gabriel [a BASE jumper], as he phones the local air service for clearance. "There are tandem [skydivers], helicopters, and paragliders—and us BASE jumpers."

Adding to the perfect topography is the bonus of public transportation. The wide-reaching system of cable cars and trains allows jumpers to practically ride to the exit points. Nowhere else on earth offers that kind of access.



UNESCO Biosphere Entlebuch, Canton Lucerne. A farm at the foot of Mt. Schrattenfluh. Mt. Schibenguettsch and Mt. Hohgant to the right.

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My one serious travel tip for Interlaken? Take your time. It would be a pity if a tight schedule caused you to miss one of the aforementioned thrills, so cushion your visit with a day or two of leeway. Then get out there and jump, fall, crash, rush, bounce, fly, and then land (safely) in dear, sweet Interlaken.

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Lucerne ranks among the world's prettiest cities, and there is so much to see. Contributing to Lucerne's cityscape alongside the world-famous Chapel Bridge and Water Tower are the Jesuit Church, the Lion Monument, and a host of other sites of interest. Lucerne is best discovered on foot—so why not take one of the many guided tours?



View from the Rigi across Lake Lucerne to the Buergenstock. The Stanserhorn is to the left, the Pilatus to the right, with the Uri and Bernese Alps to the rear.

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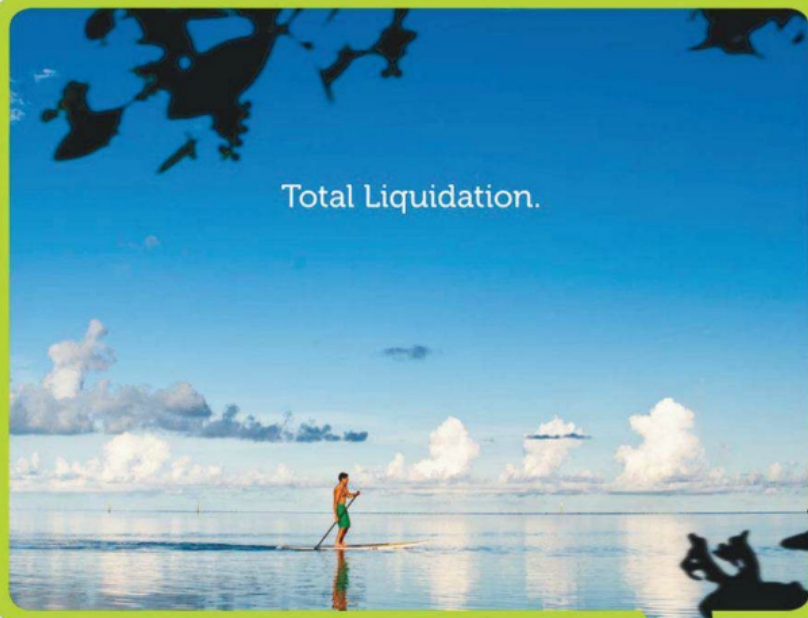
While situated in a small spot of ocean between Everglades National Park to the north and a coral barrier reef to the south, Islamorada offers big opportunities for ocean adventures. With everything from snorkeling, fishing, and kayaking to parasailing, windsurfing, and kiteboarding, the best way to experience these four islands is from the water.

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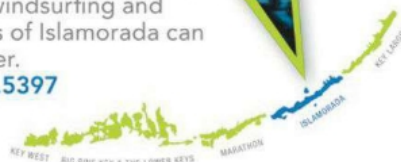
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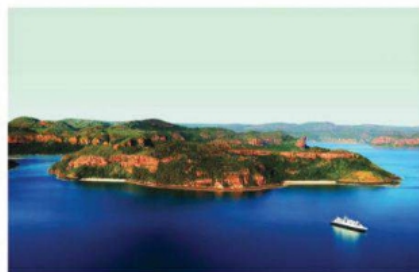
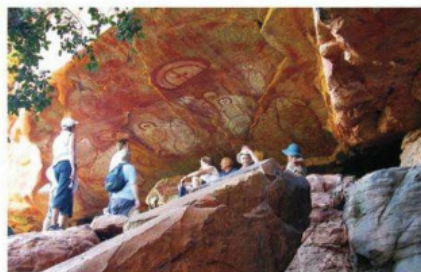
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Left: King George Falls; Middle: ancient rock art; Right: aerial shot of the Orion ship in the Kimberley region of Australia. Photo credit: Orion Expeditions

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noteworthy since very few cruise ships and tourists have explored its secluded beaches, river inlets, and abundance of wildlife. The shore is vibrantly painted with golden beaches sandwiched between the cerulean ocean and crimson earth.

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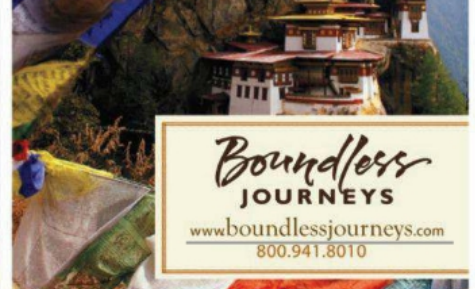
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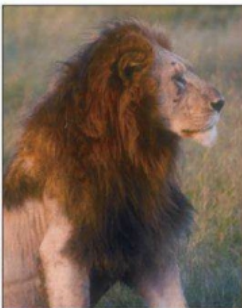
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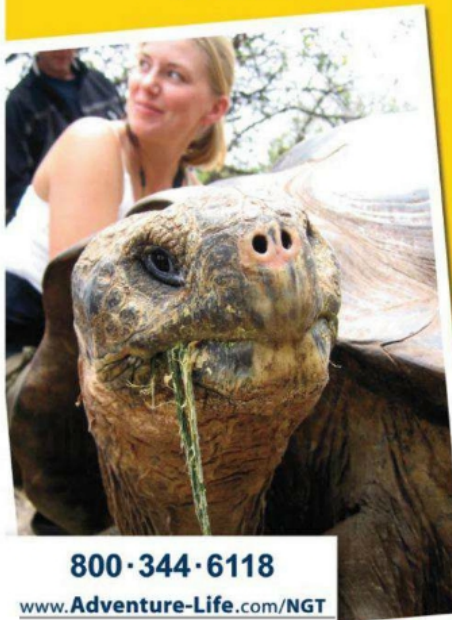
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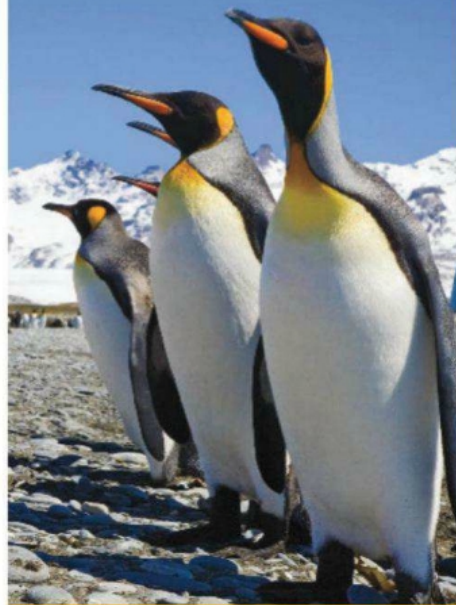


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From Ru With Lo

Freshly polished, newly proud, St. Petersburg



BY
Scott Wallace

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Sisse Brimberg *and*
Cotton Coulson

ssia ve

retakes center stage

“Hey,

dance with us!” a young man yells to me over the music’s pulsing beat. He’s draped in a crimson elf vest ten sizes too big for his slim frame, but seems oblivious to his silly appearance. Gripping my elbow, he steers me to a circle of arm-waving revelers in this cozy place called Purga Club I, stuffed into a cellar in the imperial Russian city

of St. Petersburg. Three couples in equally daft costumes—Santa hats and fuzzy bunny ears—are grooving to a DJ mix on the dance floor. ¶ I fall into this whirlwind of whimsy with an embarrassed smile, feeling out of place in jeans and hiking boots. Spotlights swirl. Red and green bulbs wink merrily on plastic Christmas trees. But it’s not Christmas. More like early summer, the season of the White Nights, when the sun barely sets this far north (St. Petersburg is near the latitude of Anchorage). This is the time when city residents shrug off endless months of winter gloom and party all night long, explaining the bacchanalian atmosphere. Except that in this lighthearted club on St. Petersburg’s Fontanka River they joyfully celebrate New Year’s Eve every night of the year.





Tea, pastries, and window-filling views at Café Singer (above) make for a classic St. Petersburg experience. Calm and wide, the Neva River (left) lends itself to day cruises, passing such sights as the 19th-century Stock Exchange and red Rostral Columns. Preceding pages: The Church of the Resurrection of Christ, completed in 1907, was modeled on Moscow's St. Basil's Cathedral.

"*Desiat, deviat, vosem, sem...*," shout partygoers. I know just enough Russian to join in the countdown. "Ten, nine, eight, seven..." When the clock strikes midnight, clouds of confetti burst out from the ceiling. Champagne corks pop. "To the new friends!" enthuses my newest friend, Sergey Kudryashoff, as he clinks glasses with Irina Nabok, a brunette whose rabbit ears flop winsomely across her eyes. Kudryashoff, 25, is a Web designer, and Nabok, 20, a drama student. They invite me to their table, eager to share with a visitor their passion for their hometown.

"It's a mystical place," Kudryashoff begins.

"A magical city, like no other place in Russia," Nabok says dreamily. She flashes a brilliant smile at Kudryashoff and adds: "Especially now, during White Nights. It becomes the city of love."

A 20-something waitress in a slinky polka-dot dress takes our order and adds her two cents. "St. Petersburg is the most European city in Russia," she says over the blare of the music. Her name is Nadya, and from her fluent English it's clear to me that she is a well-educated waitress.

I find myself warming to this half-shouted conversation over the

jaunty strains of a Brazilian *lambada*. But I'm distracted when a vaguely familiar face suddenly crowds the video screen just over Nadya's shoulder. It's a black-and-white image of Leonid Brezhnev, leader of the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982, delivering an address to a nation that no longer exists. "An old New Year's speech to the people," explains Nadya, laughing. "Part of our nightly celebration." The music is way too loud for any of us to hear Brezhnev's words, not that anyone would listen. The dour days of the Soviets have been banished, reduced to grist for light-hearted mockery on a nightclub's plasma screen.

IT'S A FAR CRY FROM THE LAST TIME I was here. Then, in the mid-1990s, St. Petersburg was still shrugging off seven decades of neglect as Soviet Leningrad. Everything was cloaked in gray, as though the entire city had been mothballed. Gangsters were feasting on the carcass of the defunct U.S.S.R.; fear had imposed a de facto curfew on the streets after dark. The visit left me wondering whether Russia would ever get its act together or if it would remain, as a Russian philosopher friend of mine asserted, "a dark mirror to the West."



Gold-limned biblical scenes fill the cupola interior of St. Isaac's Cathedral (above), one of St. Petersburg's most decorated churches. The city appears to scroll out from the cathedral's roofline (below), punctuated by such landmarks as tree-lined St. Isaac's Square.



Crowded boats churn past us, peals of laughter rippling off them like trumpet calls to merriment. Everywhere, it seems, the scent of freshness is in the air.

A dozen years of growing prosperity have brought renewed vigor to this onetime capital of the tsars. Renovations that were begun in advance of the city's 300th anniversary in 2003 continue, with major restoration projects in full swing. Western hoteliers are lining up to stake their claim, with new W and Four Seasons hotels the latest outposts of opulence just a stone's throw from the palatial Hermitage Museum. Cruise ships from Helsinki and Stockholm bring tourists to docks in and around the city.

After a tumultuous century of revolution and Cold War, has St. Petersburg returned to the world stage? Is the city, once famed across Europe for its palaces and artworks, again ready for prime time? If a feeling of safety is any indicator, the signs are good: It's well past 3 a.m. by the time I step out into the streets, and they're still very much alive with the shouts of carousers.

Nadya's words return to me the next morning as I hike across the Neva River along the Trinity Bridge and take in the view: baroque and rococo palaces in pastel blues and greens, stretching along the embankment as far as the eye can see, with the gold dome of St. Isaac's Cathedral rising beyond them in gilded magnificence.

Bisected by the Neva and laced with scores of smaller rivers and canals fronted by an endless parade of architectural gems, St. Petersburg really does have the look and feel of an enchanted city. It was its access to the Baltic Sea and, some say, the seemingly supernatural quality of the White Nights—when the northern sun barely sets and the midnight sky deepens to a Maxfield Parrish blue—that led Tsar Peter the Great to found a new capital for the Russian empire on marshlands here at the start of the 18th century. He named his creation for his patron saint, Peter. The city was to be Russia's "window to Europe"—and to the Baltic Sea, all the better to project the empire's might.

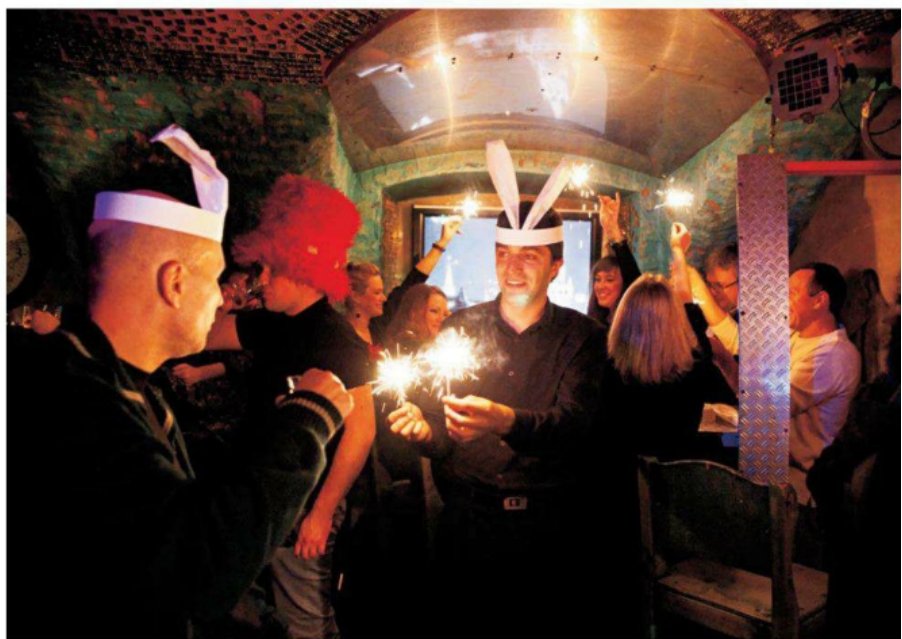
In the course of the next two centuries, the seat of power moved from St. Petersburg to Moscow and back again, as the monarchy passed from one generation to the next. All the while a succession of master builders, most notably from Italy and France, transformed the remote backwater into a unique blend of Russia and Western Europe, an imperial metropolis of palaces, boulevards, plazas, and canals of such grandeur that even today, residents claim it has a life and soul of its own.

That conviction has given rise to a movement of preservationists called Living City. Its followers are alarmed by what might be seen as the downside to all the new investment—the intrusion of sleek new hotels and buffed-granite arcades into the heart of St. Petersburg, which has been designated a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

I'm headed out to meet with Petr Zabiorkhin, one of Living City's organizers. I dodge through thickets of pedestrians as I make my way east along Nevsky Prospekt, St. Petersburg's main thoroughfare, past Palace Square, fronted by the Hermitage Museum, and Uprising (Vosstaniya) Square—two unbroken miles of world-class architecture. I bypass Kazan Cathedral, a limestone colossus that was modeled on St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and houses the crypt of Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, the commander who stood up to Napoleon's army at the Battle of Borodino in 1812. I skirt the Beloselsky-Belozersky Palace, a pink fortress girded by a phalanx of neoclassical male statues. Great Gostiny Dvor, a shopping center

that was designed in the mid-1700s—making it one of the world's oldest such centers—sprawls the entire length of another block.

Zabiorkhin is waiting for me in a coffee shop just off Nevsky. He is tall, slender, mid-30s, with blue eyes and a luxuriant blond mane, which seems to add several inches to his considerable height when he stands to greet me. A structural engineer for an international firm, he doesn't strike me as a rabble-rouser. Nonetheless, he was arrested in 2011 while trying to block deliveries to the construction site of a new department store. "Demolition and construction," he says to me in his deliberate, school-taught English, "are the twin threats that are facing our city." Even the historical buildings that lack landmark status are precious, he says, worthy of protection. "What distinguishes St. Petersburg is its historical unity. If a new building



It is always New Year's Eve at playful Purga Club 1, complete with sparklers, festive headgear, and a midnight countdown.

doesn't reflect this special quality, it damages the soul of the city."

He wants to show me another location his group is fighting to save from the wrecking ball. We step out into the hot July morning and cross the Fontanka River, tour boats shooting from beneath our bridge like torpedoes. Zabiorkhin pulls up at an unassuming brick affair wedged into a block overlooking the water. It seems an unlikely candidate for the stirring of passions. "This is a prime example of avant-garde constructivism from the 1920s," he states, apparently sensing my doubt. A plaque drilled to the wall says the building housed the electricity station that powered the city's trams during the infamous "900-day siege" of Leningrad by the Nazis in World War II. Now investors want to raze the structure for a hotel. "The damage to St. Petersburg today," Zabiorkhin laments, "can be compared to what the Nazis did during the blockade." I think he's kidding, but he's not. "More buildings on Nevsky Prospekt have been demolished in the past eight years than were destroyed by the Nazis."

I'm finding it almost impossible to grasp, after a few days of strolling its boulevards and its bridges guarded by bronze horses and winged

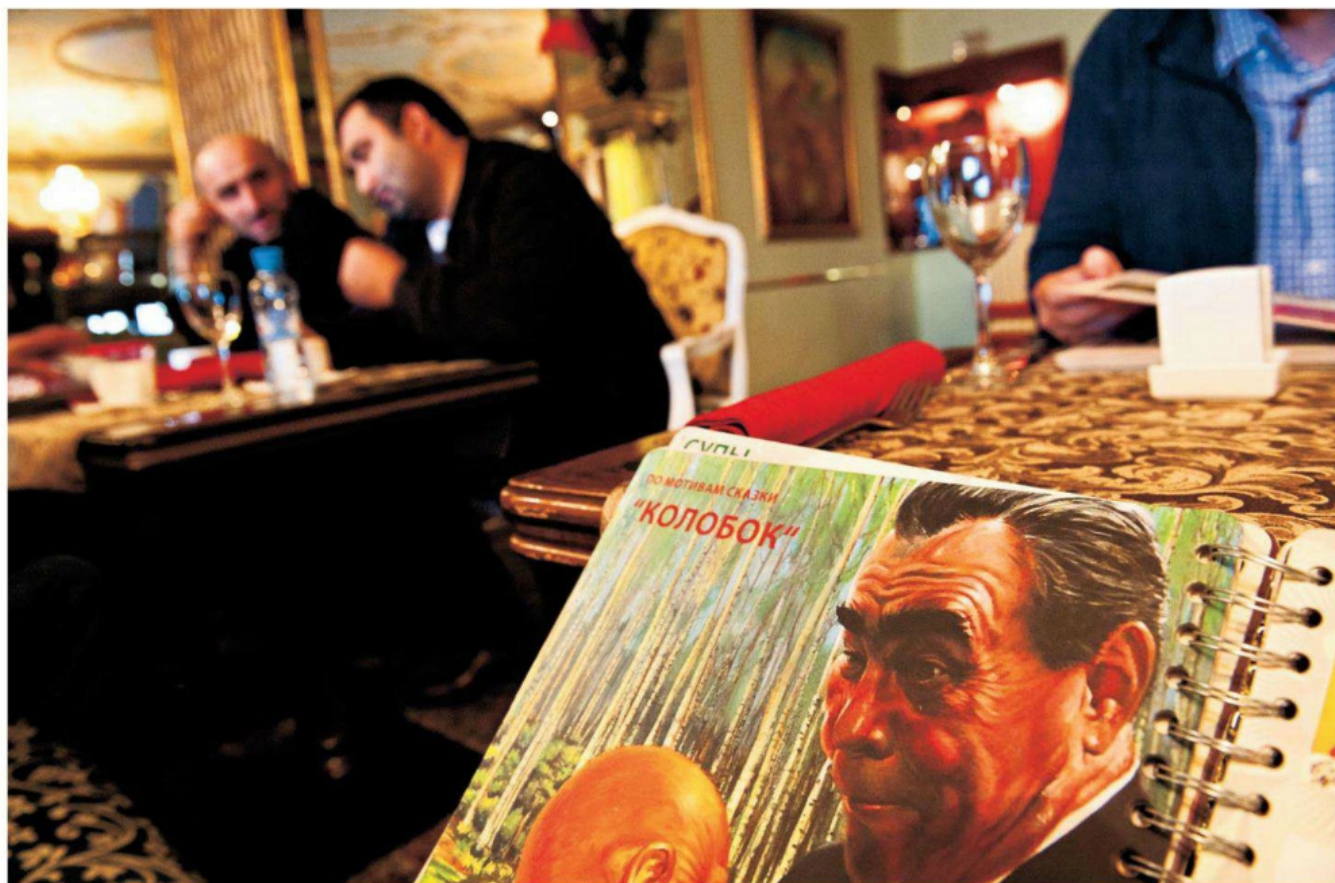
From Louis XIV's playbook: The opulent Peterhof complex of palaces and gardens, on the outskirts of St. Petersburg, was begun by Peter the Great to emulate Versailles.







More than 200 bridges stitch together this city of rivers and canals, including the Little Stable Bridge (above), on the Moika River. Soviet times are spoofed at the Russky Kitsch Restaurant (below), where Cold War stalwarts like red-faced Leonid Brezhnev live on.



The St. Petersburg I'm seeing is all about **the coexistence of light and shadow**, imperial rule and revolution, haute couture and savage invasion.

lions, that this city endured one of the longest, most brutal sieges in history. Hundreds of thousands of civilians died of starvation and disease along these streets and canals. At least another half million defenders were killed. To pay tribute to this heroic resistance, I head over to Fontanka Street the following day for a visit to the State Memorial Museum of the Defense and Siege of Leningrad. Its second floor is packed with artifacts from those two and a half years of hell: Soviet banners, propaganda posters, captured German weapons. There are graphs charting the mind-numbing quantity of air raids, firebombings, artillery barrages. A diorama depicts a typical Leningrad living room from the era: woodstove, heavy brocade curtains, a samovar on a small wooden table, a portrait of Stalin on the wall. Your imagination is left to fill in the suffering its occupants must have endured.

A caretaker off to one side is keeping a vigilant eye. She is a stout woman in a long flannel skirt, her white hair pulled back severely into a bun. It occurs to me that she might be old enough to have lived through some of this history herself. She regards me warily as I approach, but the iciness melts almost instantly. "People don't usually ask me," says Galina Sergenevna Bodrova, 73, who was only two years old when Hitler's forces drew their noose around the city in the fall of 1941. Nearly her entire family died in the first six months of the siege. "My grandparents, my parents, brothers and sisters," she says. "Only two sisters and I survived." On a sunny morning in 1942, blockade-runners took Bodrova and a younger sister through German lines to safety. Bodrova went on to marry and have a son. She has a cell phone too, shattering my image of the gruff babushka. She gives me her number and urges me to call whenever I like.

I'm beginning to sense that these small, facade-cracking encounters are a big part of what makes 21st-century St. Petersburg such a compelling place to visit.

"Do you need some help?" The question comes from the back of the bus in crisp British English. I've figured out how to navigate the buses and trams that cruise Nevsky Prospekt, but on my way to meet a friend, I'm uncertain which is the right stop to get off at. Seeing my confusion, a young woman with flaxen hair bounds up the aisle to my side. "We are learning to be more helpful to visitors," she says, smiling. Irina Federova, 23, shows me which stop to take and offers to walk me to my destination. "I'm on summer holiday; I don't need to be anywhere."

A student at St. Petersburg State University, she's majoring in something called "Japanese management." In years past it was nearly impossible to find someone on the street here who could speak anything besides Russian. But a new generation of St. Petersburg men and women eager to be part of a larger world is emerging.

Federova asks what I've seen of her city. I tell her about climbing up to the lookout beneath the dome of St. Isaac's Cathedral and traipsing through the spectacularly ornate halls of the Hermitage, fighting crowds to catch fleeting glimpses of the Rembrandts, Gauguins, van Goghs, and Renoirs. "Have you been to the Russian Museum yet?" she asks. "You must go!" Its collection of works by Russian artists is much larger than that in the Hermitage, she pronounces, all the better for experiencing the true heart of Russia.

She is waiting for me the next morning at the entrance to the yellow-stone Mikhailovsky Palace, which houses the museum. There are no lines, and thus, once we scale the grand staircase to the upper galleries, no need for us to crane our necks to behold medieval icons and monumental canvases. We pause to examine the intricate brushstrokes in "The Last Day of Pompeii," a 19th-century masterpiece by St. Petersburg-born artist Karl Briullov that depicts an apocalyptic scene of lava overwhelming the ancient Roman town. "As you can see," Federova says with the authority of an experienced tour guide, "this shows that something old is dying, but something new is already appearing."

Her words resonate as we sit in the Literary Café, surrounded by portraits of the great Russian writers Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, and



Models donning fashions by local designer Stas Lopatkin check out photos of themselves during St. Petersburg's Fashion Week.

Gogol, and dine on *draniki*—potato pancakes smeared with sour cream and red caviar. Our table has a view of the Moika River, where crowded boats churn past, peals of laughter rippling off them like trumpet calls to merriment. Everywhere, it seems, the scent of freshness is in the air.

Even where you might least expect it: the primly manicured gardens of the gargantuan Catherine Palace in the St. Petersburg suburb known as Tsarskoye Selo. This "summer" palace, commissioned by Catherine I, the wife of Peter the Great, emerged as the center of Russian autocracy in the mid-1700s when her daughter, Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, and, later, Catherine the Great, resided here and assembled works of unparalleled lavishness and staggering beauty. I take the 45-minute bus ride south from the city, lured by intriguing news that a fashion show featuring St. Petersburg's top designers is to be held on the grounds of the royal estate.

Festivities are in full swing by the time I arrive. Beneath the onion domes of the palace's church, ethereal nymphs in gauzy gowns prance across lawns, their hair piled high in gravity-defying

It's nearly impossible to grasp, **after strolling its boulevards**, that St. Petersburg endured one of the longest, most brutal sieges in history.

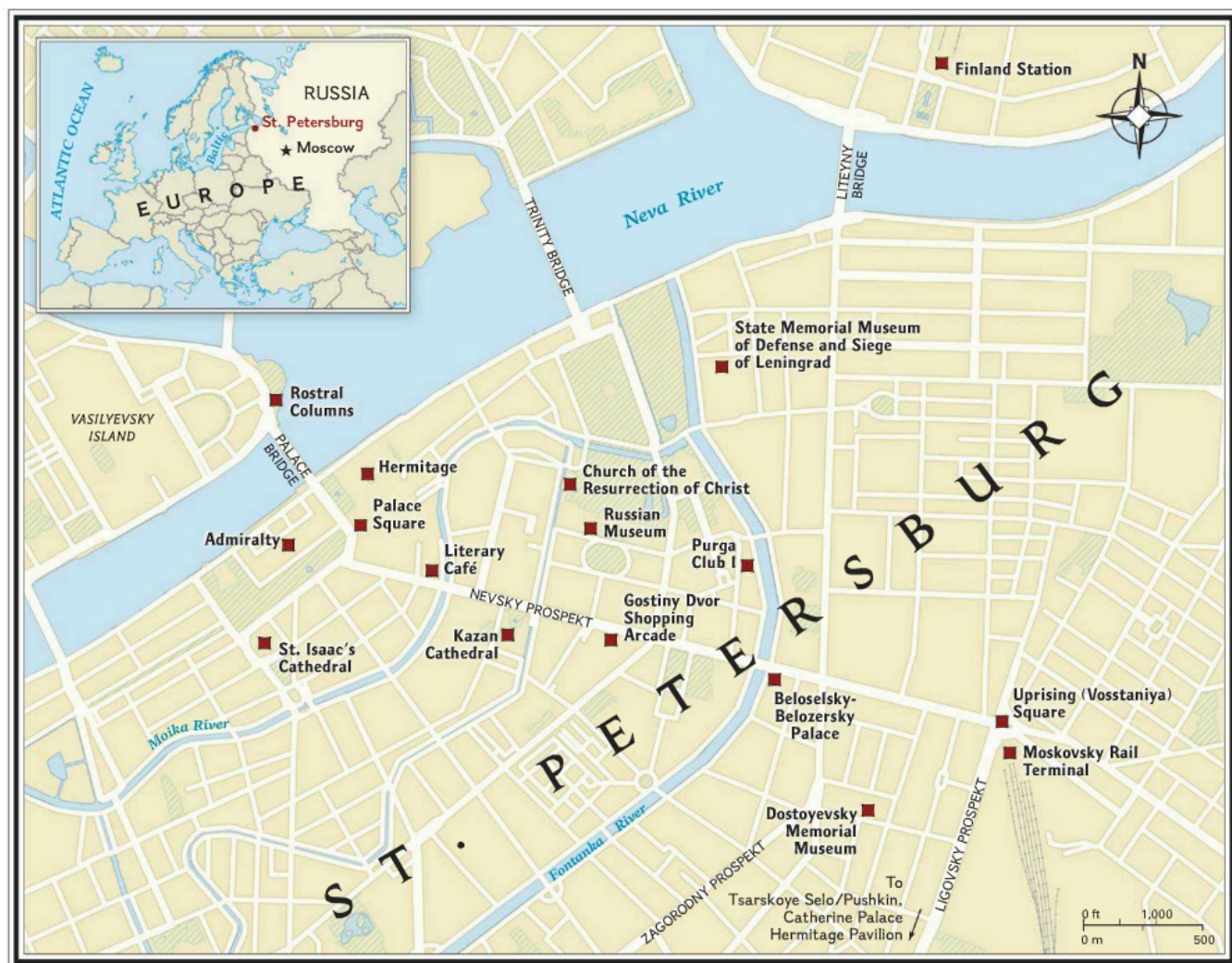
beehives. Loudspeakers pump out an odd mix of music that shifts between baroque violin sonatas and bass-heavy European techno. I wander over to the pondside Hermitage Pavilion, a minor palace in its own right, where models dressed in taffeta stride onto the veranda to enthusiastic applause.

"The high spirit and imperial atmosphere of St. Petersburg are what inspire me," says 38-year-old designer Stas Lopatkin during a break. His hair is spiked with gel, his eyes hidden behind a pair of stylish sunglasses rimmed with mother-of-pearl. He stands arms akimbo, looking calm in a whirlwind of chaos as makeup artists tend to his bevy of models. A touch of eye shadow here, a blast of hair spray there. The winter months will find Lopatkin working elsewhere in Europe, he tells me, but summer always brings him back to St. Petersburg, the source of his creative energy. "It's the transparency of air and water here," he says, pausing to search for the right words. "The colors, the light..."

The St. Petersburg I've seen is all about the coexistence of light and shadow, imperial rule and revolution, haute couture and savage invasion. For every aristocratic palace here there is an

Uprising Square, for every lavish Tsarskoye Selo estate a Soviet-style Finland Station—the St. Petersburg rail terminal where Vladimir Lenin arrived from exile in 1917, unleashing the storm that led to the triumph of the Marxist Bolsheviks.

Perhaps no artist captured the dark side of St. Petersburg—and the dreary characters who peopled its fetid slums—more convincingly than the 19th-century master Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who lived in the city as an adolescent and, intermittently, an adult. I join a procession to the Dostoyevsky Memorial Museum, an annual event that commemorates the writer's tenure in St. Petersburg. A crowd ten deep gathers around a stage outside the museum—a four-story tenement building in the historic district where the writer lived his final years. Beneath a banner proclaiming, "Art is as basic a necessity to humans as the need to eat or drink," onlookers hoot and cheer as characters from the pages of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot* strut the stage, pantomiming acts of lewdness, thievery, inebriation. I spot the obsessive police inspector, the drunken philosopher, the prostituted daughter, and, of course, an ax-wielding Raskolnikov. Natives claim that Dostoyevsky's characters are so graphically drawn





Russian naval cadets leap from the base of one of St. Petersburg's two Rostral Columns. The columns served as navigation aids in the 1800s, when the city was home to Russia's Imperial Navy, and feature statues representing Russian rivers (here, the Volkhov).

that even now you can recognize personages from the pages of his novels walking the streets of St. Petersburg. "You see it in the faces of the people," says Alla Shapiro, a student of Russian literature who teaches English at a private academy here. "Dostoyevsky's characters are alive. These are real people."

For all of its newfound openness and budding cosmopolitanism, St. Petersburg retains an atavistic edge that remains distinctly and uniquely Russian. As I follow the street away from the Dostoyevsky tribute, I pick up on the rousing strains of an all-male chorus. When I turn the corner, I run into an entire company of Russian Army recruits in baggy uniforms belting out a song while they march. It's a stirring partisan anthem, stridently nationalist, carrying a strong scent of Mother Russia and a whiff of the wild Siberian steppe. The sight of a foreigner with a video camera spurs the soldiers to even higher decibels, as if to say: "Make no mistake! You are in Russia!" As the detachment approaches, passersby along the street burst into hearty applause.

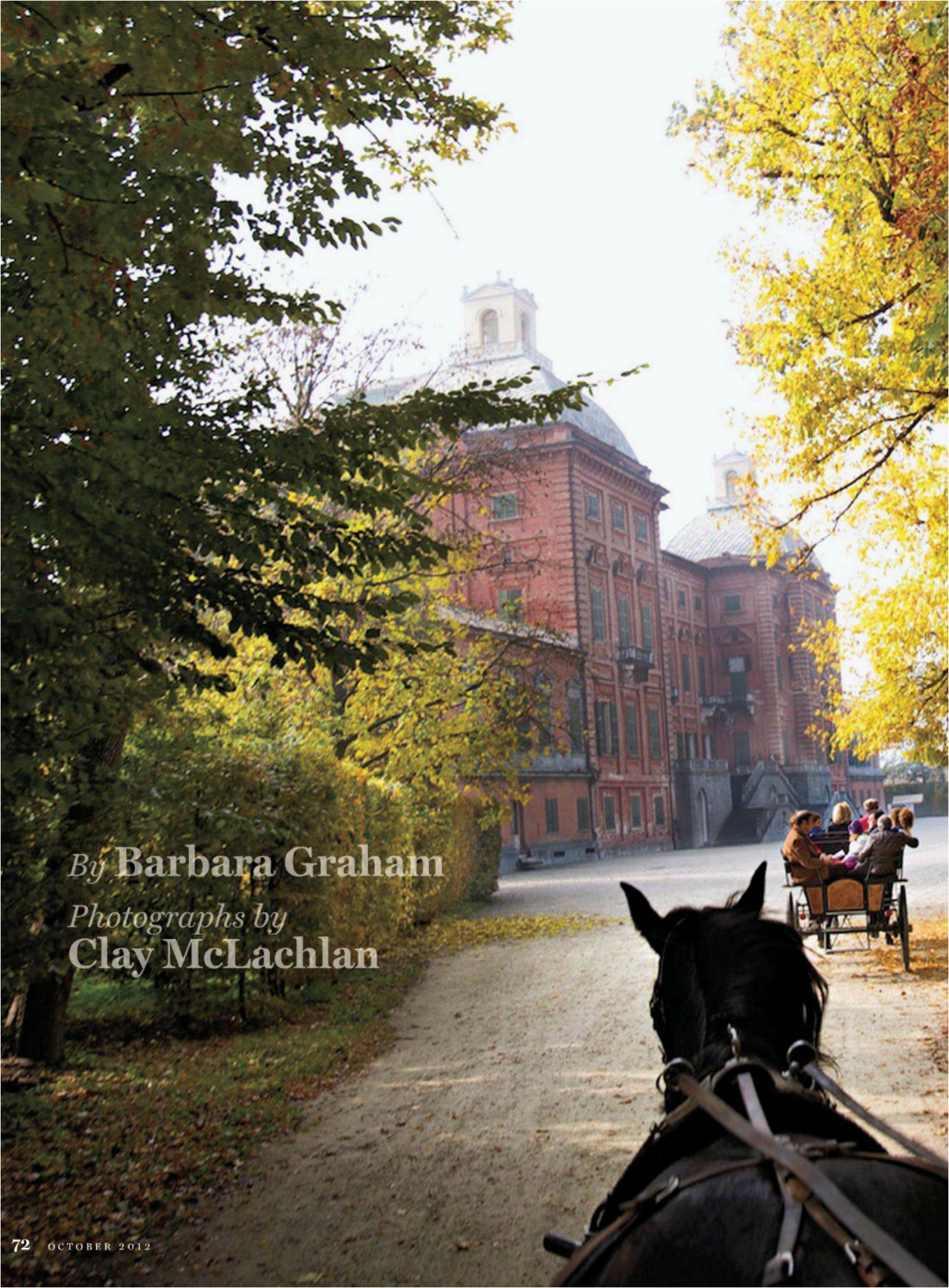
On my final night in St. Petersburg, two friends, Tatyana and Nikolai, invite me to join them for a cruise on the Neva. We stroll along the embankment to our boat, passing the white-columned

Admiralty, the old headquarters of the Russian Navy. Couples walk by arm in arm, stopping to watch clowns juggle flaming batons. Vendors hawk balloons, cotton candy, popcorn.

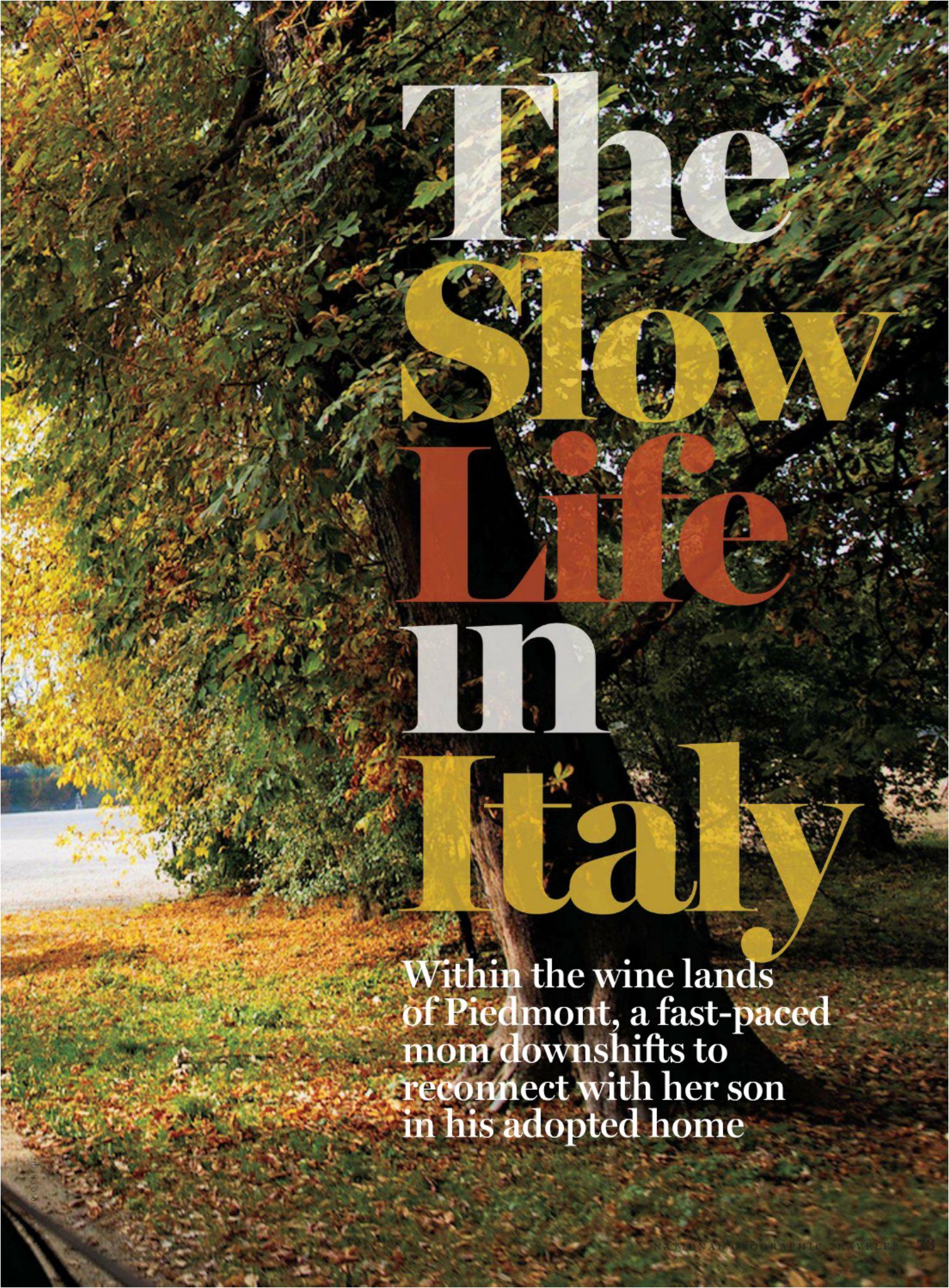
The sun has dipped below the horizon, spreading a band of deep crimson light and casting the skyline on the far bank into mysterious silhouette. Our vessel lurches into the current and heads upstream, past the vast Hermitage. Somewhere in the distance, an accordion intones the syrupy notes of a Russian ballad. Waiters strut past, their trays laden with ice buckets and fifths of vodka. Other boats slide by us in the semidarkness, the lilt of saxophones and tinkling glasses rising on the wind.

Nikolai and Tatyana snuggle. I return their smiles. Then, as we approach the Palace Bridge, the span's illuminated drawbridge arms slowly rise, as if inviting us to enter the gates of a magical kingdom. But I've known for some time that, in fact, I'm already there.

SCOTT WALLACE, author of *The Unconquered: In Search of the Amazon's Last Uncontacted Tribes*, is based in Washington, D.C. The wife-and-husband photo team of **SISSE BRIMBERG** and **COTTON COULSON** last collaborated on "Paris: The Longest Sunday" (July-August 2010).



By **Barbara Graham**
Photographs by
Clay McLachlan



The Slow Life in Italy

Within the wine lands
of Piedmont, a fast-paced
mom downshifts to
reconnect with her son
in his adopted home

*The author, flanked
by fifth-generation
winemaker Luca
Roagna and grand-
child Isabelle Eva.
Opening pages:
Racconigi Castle.*





I feel as if I'm in an Italian movie

and my son, Clay, is the director. Today's location is a hillside in Castiglione Falletto, a village in the Barolo wine region of Piedmont. The October sun warms me as I stumble along a row of grapevines in a pair of men's rubber boots two sizes too big. Before long, my fingers are the same deep purple as the clusters of plump *nebbiolo* grapes I pluck from the vines. It's the last day of harvest but my first day on the job. My costar is five-year-old Isabelle Eva, Clay's daughter. I may be a rookie, but she's a pro, having taken part in her first harvest at age two. She casts a critical eye on my pickings, then decisively rejects the grapes that resemble raisins.

"The wine from these grapes will be ready to drink on Isabelle's 20th birthday," shouts Luca Roagna, as he inches the tractor piled with baskets of fruit up the muddy hillside. Together with his father, Alfredo, Luca runs the family-owned vineyard, which was founded in the 1880s by his great-great-grandfather.

Even though I'm not really a field hand or a character in *Piemonte Paradiso*, the title of my imaginary movie, I'm thrilled to be traipsing around northwestern Italy with my only child, who, most of the time, is on the far side of the Atlantic from me. This trip is special; it's the first time Clay, a professional photographer, and I have worked together on a story. I love watching him take pictures—his concentration, his gift for capturing moments that I don't even see, his relaxed manner that puts his subjects at ease. Clay is by nature a keen observer with an artist's eye and a patient sensibility. People meeting him for the first time might even find him a bit reserved; but once he lets you in, you're as good as family.

Blood or no blood, Italy is all about *la famiglia*. So when we arrive at the vineyard for our grape-harvesting adventure, Clay and Luca greet one another like long-lost brothers. They even call each other *fratello*. I'm intrigued by everything that Luca and his family represent to my son: tradition, family togetherness, reverence for the soil, a long view of life that encompasses generations.

I'm especially intrigued because these are the very things that inspired Clay, along with his wife, Tamar—who both grew up in San Francisco—to purchase a 400-year-old farmhouse in the nearby hamlet of Bonvicino (population 119). “Luca and his family epitomize what I love about Italy,” Clay tells me. “To me, the way of life that’s normal here is very special.” Indeed, Clay speaks Italian, drives like an Italian, swears in Italian, has a posse of Italian friends, and knows his region inside out. Even physically, with his blue-gray eyes, buzz cut, and two-day-old stubble, he passes easily for northern Italian. As for me, I eat Italian—but that’s about it.

Which is partly why I did not react with joy when Clay announced in 2005 that he had bought a weekend house in Piedmont. I worried that the distance would threaten our bond. But I wasn’t surprised my son was drawn to a world so different from the one he grew up in. His father and I were hippie nomads who made sure to keep a wide buffer zone between ourselves and our parents. If there was a defining tradition in our little family unit, which dissolved when Clay was two, it had to do with breaking free. “Your parents drove you up the wall,” Clay reminds me. “The message I got was to stay as far away from family as possible.” Touché.

But in another sense, Clay and Tamar’s decision to plunk down roots in Piedmont is all about family—their family, which in addition to Isabelle includes two-year-old Azalia Luce, who was born here. “We wouldn’t have bought our house if we weren’t planning to have kids,” Clay explains. “This is where the four of us come to relax and connect. And it’s where the things I love most come together. Food, wine, natural beauty. The ultimate trifecta.”

I’ve visited Bonvicino before, but this time my mission is to puzzle out why Clay finds this little-known corner of Italy so compelling. I want to experience his Piedmont, so I’m letting him plan our days—a first for a control-freak mom. My timing couldn’t be better. We’ll be celebrating a milestone in both our lives: his 40th birthday.

C

LAY AND I FLY to Turin from Paris, where Isabelle is enrolled in the French equivalent of kindergarten, and where my son’s family has been living when school is in session. “Now I’m at home in my soul,” Clay says, beaming, the minute we set foot on Italian soil. “Just look around. In Paris everyone seems to frown all the time. Here, they’re smiling.”

We head for the Alte Langhe, an area about an hour south of Turin and the setting for my *Piemonte Paradiso*. As we approach Barbaresco, Clay begins to glow with excitement. “The light just knocks me out,” he says. “Every time I come back, it’s as if I’ve never been here before.” There is magic in this storybook landscape of hilly vineyards bathed in the luminous oranges, reds, and golds of autumn and flanked by the Alps. Piedmont literally means “at the foot of the mountain.” And though the region is often fogbound—the prized nebbiolo grape has its root in *nebbia*, Italian for fog—the afternoon is bright and clear. So clear that Clay can’t keep from pulling over every few minutes to shoot the view from another angle.

We finally arrive at the town of Barbaresco, home to the Roagnas’ winery, which the family owns in addition to its vineyards in Castiglione Falletto. Clay asks his fratello if he would kindly educate my ignorant palate. Luca tries his best, instructing me how to sniff, swirl, taste, spit, and compare vintages. I’m an avid pupil, but when



Gentle slopes, cool temperatures, and mineral-rich soil enable Barolo to produce coveted red wines.





we leave after sampling several bottles, I'm not sure I'll ever be able to tell a Barolo from a Barbaresco, let alone a Pajé from a Montefico—just a few of the sublime bottles we tried.

Still, though I may never be as discerning about wine as my son, I am nearly his equal when it comes to food. We both care passionately about sources, flavor, ingredients. We go to ridiculous lengths to procure the best. "Food is a religion in Piedmont," Clay says, en route to Dogliani—the nearest sizable village to his house in Bonvicino. "It makes sense that Slow Food started in Piedmont," he adds, referring to the culinary movement that prizes, among other things, a farm-to-table approach to cooking.

It also makes sense that Clay loves Dogliani, because Dogliani obviously loves Clay. Every place we stop—the butcher shop, the hardware store, a local wine bar—he's greeted like a returning son. Likewise at Osteria Battaglino, where, after much hugging, we're seated at the family table. As the "mamma," I'm treated with great deference and respect. I could get used to this.

I don't have high expectations for this simple restaurant in a town that doesn't make most guidebooks. Besides, after a long day I care far more about sleep than food. So I am blown away when chef Marco Battaglino presents us with exquisitely refined regional dishes made with local ingredients—most from within a 20-mile radius. Nothing can possibly top the seasonal artichoke flan appetizer, I think, until I taste the pumpkin-porcini gnocchi that follow. It's among the most transporting dishes I've tasted.

"Piemonte is crazy," Clay says, shaking his head. "Tourists hardly come here. Expats don't move here. But if this restaurant was in New York, you couldn't get a table."



Later, while lying in bed, I wonder how my California kid turned into an Italian. How did the boy who for years refused to eat anything except "flat eggs" and Cheerios wind up an expert omnivore and oenophile with a villa in Piedmont?

EARLY THE FOLLOWING morning we drive to Pollenzo, an old Roman town that's home to the University of Gastronomic Sciences (Università degli Studi di Scienze Gastronomiche). Like other Slow Food nonprofit ventures, the UGS is an expression of its founder, Piedmont native Carlo Petrini. With its turreted, red-brick buildings laid out around a courtyard and surrounded by greenery, the campus looks like something out of an academic dream. Built in 1835 as a country getaway for King Carlo Alberto, the complex draws students and visitors from all over the world.

We're met by one of the university registrars, Hanna Spengler, a German expat married to a local, and another friend of Clay. As Hanna shows us around the stables turned classrooms, I'm surprised to learn that cooking isn't part of the curriculum. "The focus is on the science, culture, and politics of food," she explains. "People come here to learn how to put the values of Slow Food into practice." Chief among those are biodiversity and sustainable agriculture; also important are pleasure and taste. In the Laboratory of Sensory Analysis, students, often blindfolded, learn to tease apart the complexities of taste in the same way sommeliers study wine.

It's late afternoon when we finally tear ourselves away. I'm determined to squeeze in a walk before dinner, so we head to Bra. After stops in the official Slow Food store and Giolito Formaggi, a famous cheese shop with its own cheesemaking exhibit, Clay ushers me into a *pasticceria*. It looks as if the whole town has turned

out for a predinner quaff. "I love this ritual," he says over espresso. "Friends and families out together. It's so vibrant and lively, but not because of tourists. No English spoken here."

Once again I'm moved by my son's appreciation of strong family bonds and community—which, incidentally, I share. Genuine community may be the only antidote to the dizzying rush of our e-world. Still, the fact that Clay has found his ideal of family and community so far from his actual family back in the U.S.A. is not without a dose of irony. When I say this, he replies, "One's own family is always a bit more challenging than other people's, don't you think?"

I refrain from pointing out that, for me, there's also a soupçon of sadness in the current arrangement. Clay knows just how much I wish that he and his family lived closer to me; there's no point in discussing it. Besides, I don't have a leg to stand on. I often wonder if the fact that we live at such a distance is my karmic comeuppance. I, who as a young mother never dreamed of living anywhere near my own parents. I, who had my number unlisted (when I had a phone) so my mother couldn't call me and tell me I was ruining my life. I, who, when Clay was six months old, moved him to a plywood shack in the mountains of northern California, where we had no running water, no electricity, and our nearest neighbors—sometimes way too close for comfort—were bears. Not only that, as a free-spirit hippie mama, my mantra was—and still is: Be true to yourself.

Even though I haven't said a word, I know that Clay knows exactly what I've been thinking. To relieve the tension, I ask, "So, what are you going to do with me when I'm old and feeble?" This line is the standard opener to one of our little mother-son routines.

He turns his head in my direction, cocks an eyebrow, and admonishes faux-darkly, "You'd better learn Italian."

We both laugh. The image of me as a wizened, toothless, ancient signora cloaked in black and living in a Piedmontese old-age home doesn't exactly fit. "*Perfetto*," I say as we get ready to zip along the winding country road toward our next destination.

I've been warned about this dinner. I've been told I'll be eating "bunny candy"—that is, crisp, juicy rabbit roasted on a spit over an open fire. But as far as I'm concerned, rabbits are either hairy vermin or adorable fuzzy pets—take your pick—but not dinner, and I'm dreading this meal. I may be a foodie, but a vegetarian-leaning one who is game-phobic. "Have I ever steered you wrong, foodwise?" Clay asks confidently.

As it turns out, Filippo Oste is an unexpected prize. Located in Albaretto della Torre, a two-block village, the osteria looks like somebody's house. We even have to ring the doorbell to get in. We're met by the gracious owner, Filippo Giaccione, a one-man band who runs the front of the house, waits tables, and periodically pops back to help the lone chef in the kitchen. And Clay is right. Once I get past my bunny phobia, the *coniglio* tastes as good as promised, crisp and smoky, without being overly pungent. I commend Filippo, then ask him what impact Slow Food has had on his restaurant.

He just chuckles. "My family has been making slow food since way before Carlo came up with the idea. Slow food is part of our culture. The movement is much more important outside Italy."

Even though just about every bite that's passed my lips since arriving in Piedmont has been local, seasonal, and delectable, I'm afraid that if I continue my eating jag I'll be waddling down the aisle by the time I board my plane back to the U.S. "*Basta!*" I tell Clay on our way home. "Isn't there something else to do in this place besides eat and drink?"

Osteria dei Binelli's dining room (below). Opposite, from left: Ancient Romans prized "Caesar's mushroom," a valued ingredient at Filippo Oste; sliced prosciutto and country bread make for a study in local cuisine at the University of Gastronomic Sciences.



"Nobody visits Piedmont unless they're obsessed with food and wine," he counters. Still, my son knows my limits. "Tomorrow I'm taking you to the Parco Naturale delle Alpi Marittime, where we can hike from Italy to France. We'll fast all day." But in the morning we learn that the snow has come early and the road into the park is impassable. We take a gentle hike on a path that crosses the vineyards between the towns of Novello and Barolo. Stands of golden poplar shimmer in the afternoon light; across the valley, the church tower and red tile roofs of La Morra complete the scene.

I think I'm starting to grasp why Piedmont resonates so deeply with my son. Why he and Tamar, who have traveled the world, chose this place over, say, Tuscany, with its incredible art. Here, the way of life is the art. The people are warm and welcoming. The region remains authentic, even as it keeps pace with the modern world. It's the slow life at its best.



THE NEXT DAY our mother-son interlude comes to an end. First to arrive are Tamar and the bambini, followed by my husband, Hugh. Suddenly I'm Nonna again, and I'm making macaroni necklaces, playing ballet teacher, and turning out "flat eggs" as fast as Isabelle and Azalia can eat them. Our itinerary changes radically. There are daily excursions to the playground in nearby Bossolasco, followed by

stops at Eugenio Truffa, an award-winning pasticceria that serves what may be the world's best hot chocolate. And because the girls really believe they're princesses, Clay and I take them to Racconigi Castle, an estate renovated, with mixed results, by nearly every royal who owned it since the Middle Ages. With Isabelle dressed as Rapunzel and Azalia in a fairy princess outfit, we time-travel back to the 1800s and sweep through the grounds by horse-drawn carriage, past a large conservatory, a lake, and a grotto dedicated to Merlin the magician.

Later, we rush back to Dogliani to meet Hugh and Tamar at Osteria dei Binelli, a converted farmhouse on a hilltop overlooking a grove of hazelnut trees that Clay calls "one of my favorite spots on Earth." Here, Sunday lunch is as much about family as it is about food. We're joined by Clay's neighbors Karel and Filiberto Pinca ("the Italian grandparents"). The couple had planned to move from her native England to his childhood home of Sorrento after they retired, but high housing prices drove them north. "Piedmont is the best kept secret in Italy," Filiberto proclaims. "We pray it never becomes the new Tuscany."

At last, it's the morning of my son's 40th birthday *festa*. Doug Polaner, a wine importer from New York State and Clay's good friend, makes a confession. "I feel as if I'm packing heat," he says, referring to his cache of *tartufi bianchi*, or white truffles. We've just spent an hour sniffing, studying, weighing, and comparing the prized but ugly fungi in the back room of a truffle emporium that reminds me of a drug den. Now, rushing through the cobblestone streets of Alba, *tartufi bianchi* capital of the world, we're getting pounded by rain. Our soggy crew includes three of Clay's pals from Paris who have flown in for the feast. Doug is our chef, as well as my truffle tutor. "The stinkier the better," he says.

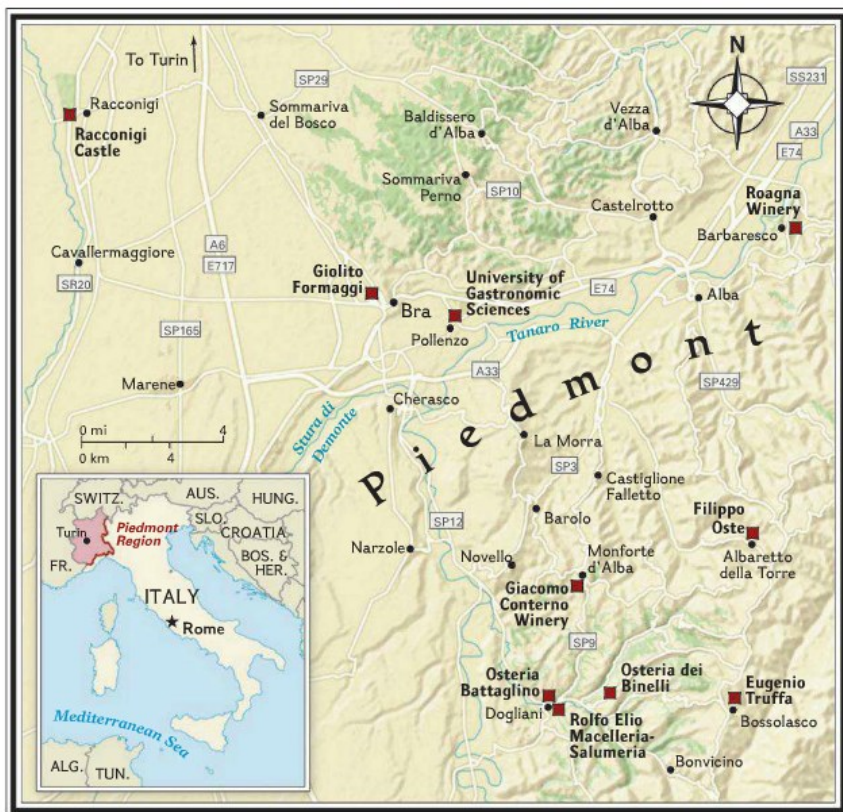
We spend the day shopping in the freezing rain: vegetables and cheese from the Friday market in Bra, fresh pasta and molten chocolate cake from Osteria dei Binelli, eggs and meat from Rolfo Elio Macelleria-Salumeria in Dogliani. Our afternoon is capped by a private tasting with winemaker Roberto Conterno at Giacomo Conterno Winery in Monforte d'Alba, which Clay calls "the holy grail of Barolo." The guys all have looks of ecstasy on their faces as they sniff and swirl. They talk cherries, berries, iodine, pears. Only Isabelle, who turns the cavernous cellar into her playground, is more clueless than I. It's past five o'clock when we finish, leaving Doug little time to whip up dinner before the guests arrive.

But whip he does, and a few hours later we gather around the long table in the former hayloft that Clay and Tamar have transformed into a beautiful entertaining space. Outside, rain seems to be washing the world away; inside we dine on five truffle-laden courses. We sip rare wines and Champagne brought by Doug and two other guests, Roberto Conterno and Luca Roagna. Some bottles are from 1971, the year Clay was born. Back then I never could have imagined my sensitive boy a self-assured man—let alone a married man and father of two daughters—at home in Italy, surrounded by family and friends celebrating his 40th birthday in multiple languages.

In his toast, Hugh, Clay's stepfather for 30 years, tells him: "People who succeed later in life are people who live their passion. I see you as someone who already knows this secret." If I'd wished for anything for my son back in 1971, it was this. Maybe I wouldn't have wished for his passion to take root several time zones away from me, but parents don't get to script their children's lives.

Sitting at the table, I realize that our children are ours but not ours. When they're small they're almost entirely ours. Then, little by little, they take their place in the world, until they hardly need us at all. Forty seems like another one of those cardinal crossings. But I needn't have worried. I know now that the love we share hasn't shifted over time, no matter where my son's dreams take him.

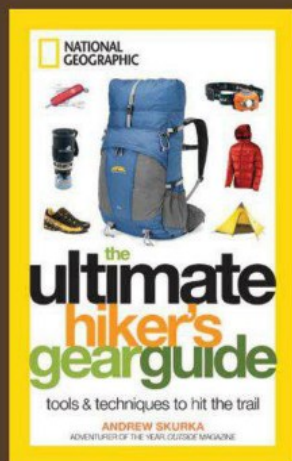
Writer **BARBARA GRAHAM** edited the best seller *Eyes of My Heart*. Her son, photographer **CLAY MCLACHLAN**, specializes in food and wine.



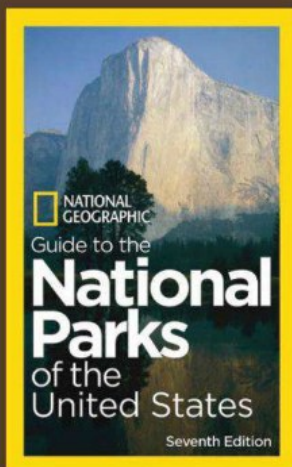


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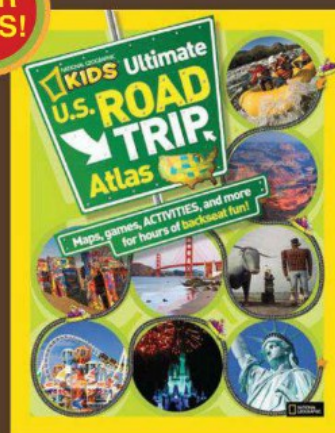
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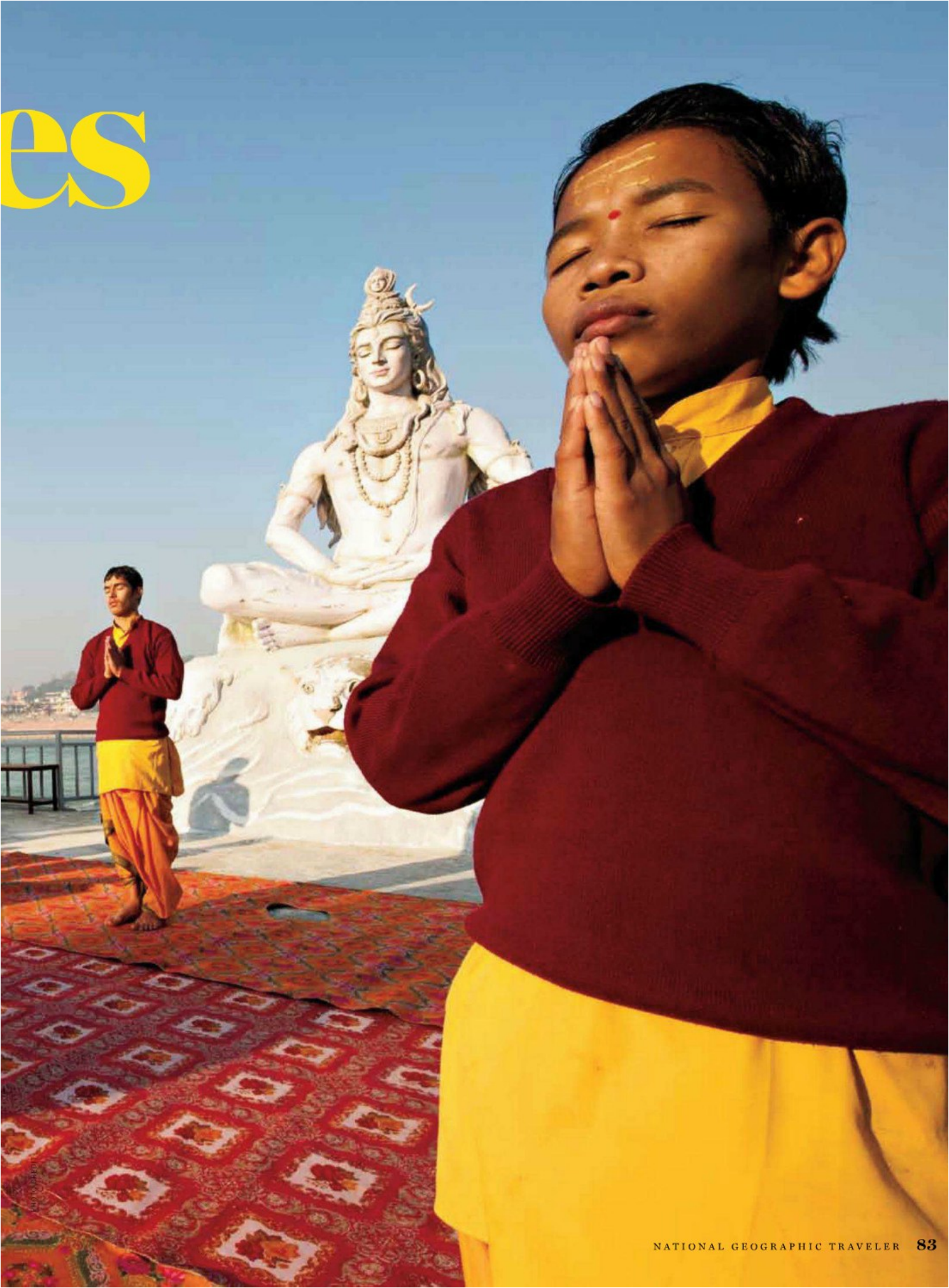
Here Come the Sun

Rishikesh, India—famously visited by the Beatles—enlightens a yoga skeptic

Story and Photographs by
PETER McBRIDE

*Young residents at
Parmarth Niketan
Ashram practice yoga
by the Ganges River
near a statue of Shiva.*

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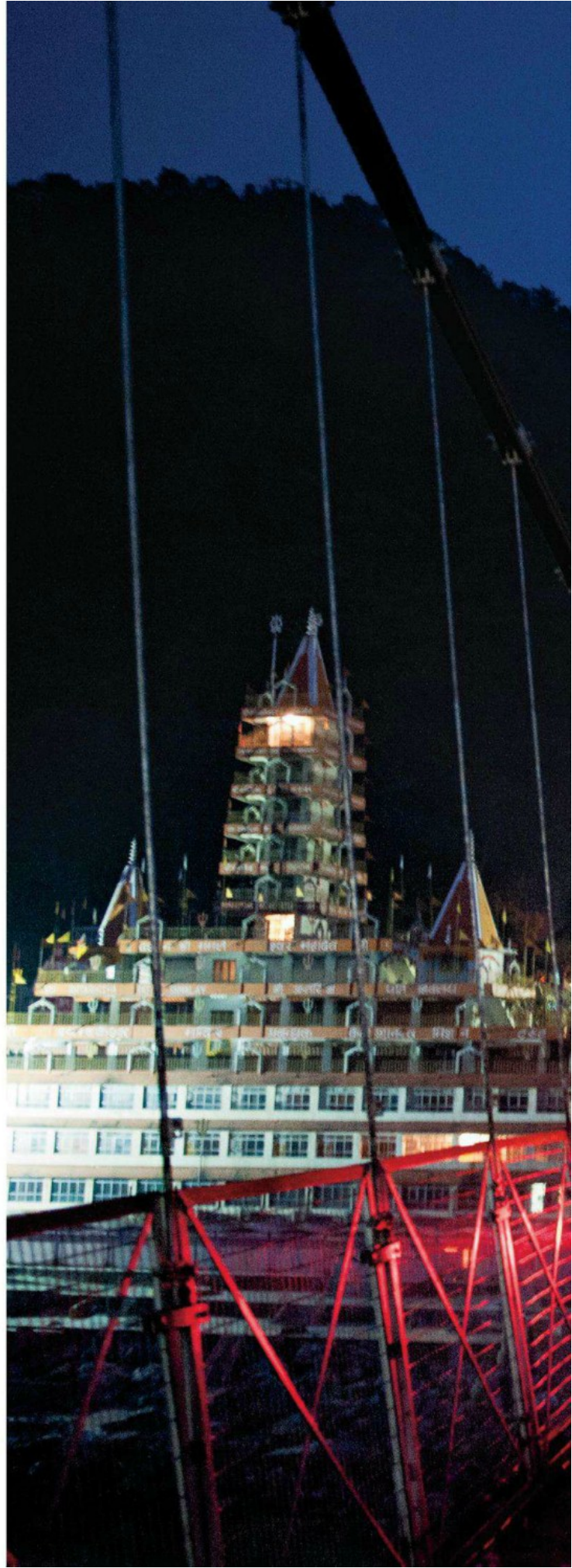
High above the silvery flow of the Ganges River,

on a swaying suspension bridge, I realize how far I've strayed from my quest. The metronome sound of a Royal Enfield motorcycle ticking beneath my legs is the giveaway. I had come to the remote town of Rishikesh, India—a gateway to the Himalaya—with a vision of deep silence and lots of focused yoga. Yet something, karmic vibrations perhaps, lured me astray.

Rishikesh is a shopping mall for spirituality straddling the Ganges northeast of New Delhi. For those seeking enlightenment or adventurous escape—hippies, spiritual tourists, religious pilgrims, river rats—the healing power of the Ganges is a strong magnet, attracting hundreds of thousands each year. As a result, Rishikesh and its neighboring big brother, Haridwar, are hot spots teeming with ashrams, yoga schools, white-water rafting companies, and vegan restaurants (by law, the region is vegetarian and alcohol free).

In 1968, the Beatles came to this corner of India to study transcendental meditation. Ringo left early, but John, Paul, and George stayed for weeks at Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's ashram—and wrote some 40 songs. Many of the songs found their way onto the 1968 *White Album*. I hadn't come to write music, however, but to retune an ailing back.

Growing up on a cattle ranch in central Colorado, I forged some less than limber muscles loading hay bales—and competing in such local sports as ice hockey, ski racing, and mountain biking. My idea of stretching had involved a few toe touches. OK, shin





*Slung across the
Ganges River
near the town of
Rishikesh, the
Laxman Jula
suspension
bridge leads to
Hindu temples.*



touches, maybe. Sure, I'd attended my handful of power yoga, *vinyasa* flow, and even Bikram classes, where the room temperature exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The American yoga scene offered a good workout—but, frankly, was too distracting. I was that sweaty guy in the back of the studio, struggling to keep up and often more focused on the figures in front of me than on my breath. The therapeutic value was limited.

My years of sports, paired now with the immutable milestones of aging, had resulted in a persistent, jarring pain in my lower spine. After I'd endured the cracks of chiropractors, the pricks of acupuncturists, even the painful kneading of Rolfers, an x-ray revealed what looked to be a photo of Jenga—that wooden-block tower game. Except my vertebrae were the blocks. And one vertebra stuck disturbingly more inward than the rest. According to my doctor, the condition is relatively common. But if I didn't stabilize the area with core strength exercises and stretching, I would be forced to have my lower spine fused—surgery, metal rods. Yoga, I was told, could maybe help. Enter Rishikesh, world capital of yoga. I'd put my beef-eating and coffee- and wine-guzzling habits on hold to embrace the ashram lifestyle in its motherland. Prepared to contort body and mind, I set off to find my inner om. What did I have to lose? Back surgery, for starters.

THE DISTRACTING RUMBLE of a motorcycle was not part of the yoga retuning. However, I told myself, the siren song of a classic British bike (built in India) wouldn't pull me entirely off my quest.

Motoring in second gear, I glide through dense traffic on the swaying suspension bridge. Pedestrians—some barefoot, others ornate with painted sandals and jeweled toes beneath softly swishing wraps—whisper as I weave past and around the wheeled and hoofed traffic of mopeds and sacred cows clattering across the span. There is such spatial awareness that cow horns and handlebars on vehicles coming from opposite directions occasionally touch yet avoid entanglement. Rhesus monkeys, hanging from steel cables above, study every move of every passerby, looking to snatch food and shiny objects.

After I cross the bridge, I head down an alley and turn into the back courtyard of Parmarth Niketan Ashram. I've been in residence here for three days and am in the groove—feeling squarely centered in the present moment. I'd chosen Parmarth because it is less strict than other ashrams, allowing guests to come and go. Just be back before curfew. I was also impressed by its mission to offer free medical care to those in dire need. In addition, Parmarth supports maybe 200 boys—some orphaned—called Rishikumar, providing housing, food, basic academic education, and spiritual teachings.

At 6:50 a.m. the next day I sit in a simple room with a wooden floor, white walls, a metal roof, and poster-size black-and-white photos of Pujya Swamiji smiling down on our group of students.

View from the driver's seat: The author maneuvers his Royal Enfield motorcycle through the narrow streets of Rishikesh (above). Donations collected at Bhootnath Temple (left, top), help maintain the facility. Spiritual seekers from around the world gather to bathe and pray in the Ganges River (left).

I have
been
here for
three
days now
and am
in the
groove—
feeling
squarely
centered
in the
present
moment.



Named 1991's Hindu of the Year by *Hinduism Today* magazine, Pujya Swamiji left home at age eight to study in the Himalaya. Today he is the spiritual head of Parmarth, and though he doesn't teach, he occasionally is on the scene in the evening. (I would have the honor of talking with him twice during my stay.)

As I listen to my yoga teacher, an American, I work on a breathing technique that involves inhaling and exhaling through one nostril at a time.

Patience. Breathe.

I move into the upright mountain pose and focus on absences. There are no New Age tunes pumping through hidden speakers, no distracting yoga outfits, no blinding heat, no incense, and no attitude. Just students and a teacher. Before I came here, I knew something about the cultural divide between Indian and American yoga—how some say that the Yankee infatuation with fitness has caused American yoga to stretch more in the direction of exercise. Others argue that the dichotomy is all part of yoga's ongoing evolution. Either way, I tackle the postures wearing a down jacket and long pants. Throughout much of the year, Rishikesh is hot, at times scorching. But now, in December, the mornings are frigid. I miss the music initially but quickly become aware of the Himalayan

rhythms all around us: the scurrying of monkeys on the roof and the clanking of the studio's wooden shutters by glacial wind gusts.

After class, in the dining hall, I meet Ramya, one of two American yoga teachers at the ashram. She came here on a sabbatical after her children left the nest. When I ask her about yoga's cultural divide, she smiles. "There is a saying: 'Yoga came to change America, but America changed yoga.'" I digest the observation as I embrace my first off-the-mat yogi test—eating. With little choice, my appetite submits

to the Vedic diet of alkaline foods: lentils, rice, cooked veggies, spices. I quickly grow fond of the code of silence during mealtime. The quiet is broken only by the symphony of utensils on metal plates and the recorded mantra chants played on a nine-volt radio next to the serving line.

The coffee withdrawal, at first, is cruel. The other staggering hurdle is eating cross-legged on a marble floor. My hips detest it. Small tables, maybe eight inches high, are a luxury offered mostly for Westerners. They provide little comfort.

During one meal, a regular ashram visitor from Brazil named Abrau points out how horridly fast I eat.

"I used to eat like you; fast as I could to get to something else."

"I know, my tapeworm is quite active," I say, smiling. He doesn't laugh. "I'm kidding. Actually, I'm trying to finish my meal before my hip or knee dislocates from contorting to fit to this marble floor."

He laughs. "Yes, just remember, your digestion is not in a hurry."

"Noted. Thanks." I felt an urge to remind Abrau about that code of silence at mealtime.

Patience. Breathe.

OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, I drift through a pattern of waking to the ashram's 5 a.m. meditative mantra chants, attending cold yoga classes before breakfast, and eating meals in silence (slightly more





Holy men, traditional architecture, and lush gardens set the scene at Parmarth Niketan Ashram, a sprawling spiritual retreat near the town of Rishikesh.

slowly). I also begin leaving the sprawling ashram on exploratory sorties around Rishikesh and neighboring Haridwar.

It's beyond the ashram that I discover my secret meditation weapon: the Royal Enfield motorcycle. I'd connected with its source, a man named Madhav, via Facebook. Raised in an ashram himself, Madhav abandoned the austere path the day he arrived in Rishikesh. He claims that "the power of the Ganges was so high, I couldn't depart." Today, he does the logistical heavy lifting for large groups visiting the area. He also helps with random requests from visitors like me. After I repeatedly e-mailed him asking the best way to get from A to B, he finally asked, gently, "Peter, would a motorcycle work for you?"

When I meet Madhav, he is smiling next to my British-designed, Indian-built 500cc bike, a shimmering classic. I can't decide which looks nicer, my motorized magic carpet or my new friend, the clean-shaven, big, smiling Madhav. I offer to pay for the rental in advance. Madhav gives a slight head wobble and responds, "No problem, Peter. You pay later." It's then I realize Madhav is one of those local folks you never want to lose, even after you have returned home.

ON MY FIRST OUTING, I explore the crumbling ashram where the Beatles lived. As I wander the ruins, I wonder where Lennon wrote "Dear Prudence." The lyrics "won't you come out to play" are said to be a plea to friend Prudence Farrow, Mia's sister, to snap out of a reclusive state of meditation. I use Lennon's words to validate my motorcycle venture.

During sunsets, I enjoy the singing at *aarti*—the Hindu "happy hour"—a daily ceremony on the banks of the Ganges. Scores of Indians and a sprinkling of curious travelers sing Hindu hymns and swirl lanterns to seal prayers before splashing Ganges water on their feet. Some offer their prayers via candles that they float downstream in miniature boats made of leaves as a white statue of Shiva, the all-powerful Hindu yogi deity, looks on.

Despite such blissful days, I found myself anxiously wondering if the yoga classes would become more challenging, if I would learn some spine-curing contortions and become more limber. Not once

had I even broken a sweat in class, despite my down jacket. Was I missing something? My back ached.

Patience. Breathe.

When I bump into Madhav, who continues to help me navigate the area, steering me to the best cup of masala chai or the freshest belly-safe salad (Ramana's Garden), I express my concerns about my therapy.

"Peter, remember, yoga is more about the mind than the body," he pauses. "And don't worry so much," he says with an easy, toothy grin, his perfectly shaved head almost glowing as he smiles. "Remember, worry is praying for what you don't want."

After a week on the ashram routine, I leave camp and motor up the Ganges.

STAY LEFT, STAY LEFT quickly becomes my mantra as I wind past candy-striped buses and overstuffed rickshaws belching black clouds. Left-side driving is easy to adapt to—until you forget.

Madhav had said that the Ganges's power strengthens farther upstream, an area where cave dwellings are not unusual. Snaking north, I pass bands of rhesus monkeys fearlessly sitting in the road, awaiting scraps. I dodge rockfalls and lean hard into turns, nearly scraping my toes. In sections the road shadows the Ganges; in others, the glacial green river water flows hundreds of feet below, churning under cliffs. I grin constantly.

Breathe. Relax. Stay left.

Cars and trucks pass three abreast, blaring trumpetlike horns that echo off the mountains. Despite many reckless passes and near misses, no one shakes a fist or seems to holler a Hindi word of road rage. If they do, I miss it in translation. The flow of chaotic karma keeps moving up this road. Signs written in cursive letters offer yogi-like reminders: "License to Drive, Not to Fly."

As the sun expands into an orange ball on the horizon, I arrive at Vashista cave, thought to be the oldest meditative cave in the region. Some call it the birthplace of conscious thought. It's also where I can catch a rowboat ferry across the Ganges to Anand Lok, a yoga and meditation retreat where I'll stay for two days. First, though, I have to find somewhere to park my motorcycle.

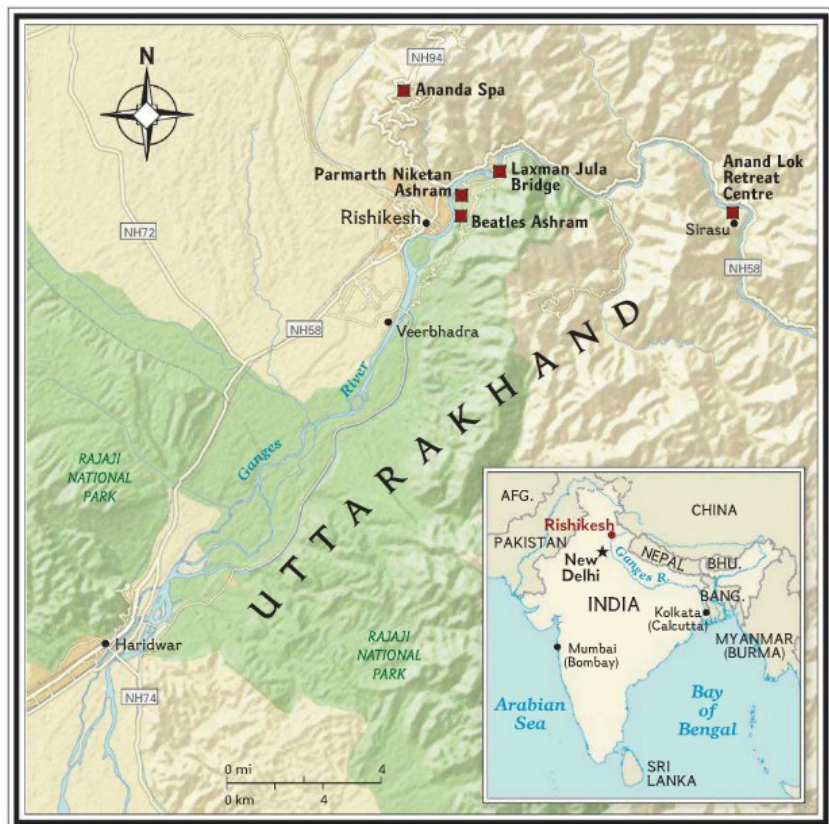
With dusk gathering, I notice a man cloaked in the saffron-colored robes of a sadhu. I approach him and ask if he can help me with the bike. He opens his arms warmly and says, "Leave bike with me." In my mind, a red flag shoots skyward. While saffron robes generally signify a "holy man" or one who has renounced the material world, rumors circulate that criminals use these same robes as a cover when in hiding. Flash decision time. I choose to stick with Madhav's nonworry approach.

"OK, I'll be back in a few days, and I'll tip you nicely. Keep an eye on my baby." My new Enfield minder smiles. I walk to the river and up the stone beach to the ferry.

Anand Lok overlooks the Ganges on the edge of Sirasu, a village with no roads. Only one pedestrian *jula* (bridge) and ferry service (except during the monsoon season) connect it to the modern world.

The warmest smile I've ever witnessed greets me on arrival. Jagdish, who is in charge of housekeeping and restaurant services, makes me feel welcome.

For the next couple of days, two fellow visitors from Parmarth—one Dutch, one Chilean—and I walk along the Ganges, drink chai to ward off the evening and early morning chill, and play with schoolchildren in the village. Throughout India, the poverty can be alarming, even





*Ceremonial moment:
A candle is lit in a flower-
filled bowl that will float
along the Ganges River
through such towns as
Haridwar (below).*



A cow noses in on a tea break in Rishikesh. The Ganges slices through misted foothills of the Himalaya (below).



overwhelming. Its bony hand reaches into every corner, including the village of Sirasu. However, the smiling faces of Jagdish and his neighbors offer testimony to the wealth of contentment in their world of little. Like many villagers, they are poor in rupees yet rich in spirit and appear remarkably happy.

I ask Jagdish if he does yoga.

"Yes, every day. Work is my yoga. My job keeps my body flowing."

Motivated to keep my yoga flowing, I do sun salutations on a sandy Ganges beach one morning. A village teenager, who speaks little English, decides to drop his firewood chores and join me. As if on cue, this rippling, muscled teen closes his eyes and falls backward, folding into an arching backbend.

"Wow," I say.

Given our language rift, we end up communicating with yoga poses and laughter. After a while, I point to the river and say, "Swim?" The boy answers with a head wobble—that ubiquitous Indian gesture that I loosely understand as "very good."

Under clear, crisp blue skies we strip down to boxers and dash into the icy waters of the Ganges. The blast of cold immediately steals my air and pierces me awake. Swimming in the Ganges is believed to be purifying not just physically but also symbolically, washing away all prior sins. My new swimming companion and I let out whoops as we clamber back to shore. I can't say if my sins have vanished, but I feel electrified.

"HELLO?" I SAY HESITANTLY as I enter total darkness. Rookie move. Clearly not the best way to enter an ancient meditation cave. No one answers.

I'd left my young swimming pal, Anand Lok, and Jagdish to recross the Ganges and get back on the road. I also wanted to spend time in Vashista cave. Shuffling through cool, sweet air, across grain-sack flooring, I stop near candlelight, sit down cross-legged, and try to relax. Eyes closed, I focus on my breathing. My mind quickly strays. *Why am I here? Has the sadhu stolen my bike?*

Relax. Just a rental. Breathe.

I return the focus to my lungs. A mental rhythm aligns with my breath. I open my eyes. Suddenly, I see the entire cave. I'm alone at the end of a long tunnel-like passageway. Tokens of worship sit near candles on a stone altar. The air tastes even sweeter, fresher now.

Back outside, I glance at the time. My internal clock tells me I have meditated for maybe 10 minutes. My watch says it has been over 50. Where did I go?

Parked just as I'd left it, the shiny Enfield sits up the hill, unharmed. My bike keeper magically appears.

"See, no problem," he says. "Bike here. I'm sadhu. Money."

I happily hand over a wad of rupees—about \$5—to a man who is likely not a sadhu. He shuffles his saffron robe, quickly burying the notes in a fold, then says, "More. Hungry." I peel off a few more notes, which he gingerly takes before disappearing toward the river. I tally the parking cost: \$7.

ON FIRST KICK, my bike rumbles to life. Feeling almost drugged from my Vashista time warp, I cruise, meditating on the road.

Stay left. Stay left. Stay left.

Riding now by instinct, feeling what I can't help but call "biker Zen," I swerve past cows, their calves, street vendors, sadhus, hippies, and healers. I continue meditating, maintaining a laser awareness of my surroundings and my existence at this exact time in space. This precious present moment. Although I've missed my friend Madhav and the ashram, I take one more quick side trip.

Hidden in the hills just north of Rishikesh, Ananda Spa—which originally was a palace of the maharaja of Tehri Garhwal—is considered one of the best spas in the world.

The treacherous road to Ananda comes with warning signs:

"Don't worry so much," Madhav says, his perfectly shaved head almost glowing. "Worry is praying for what you don't want."

"Sharpest Turns Ever"; "Road Is Hilly, Don't Be Silly"; and "After Whiskey, Driving Risky." I feel as if the Dalai Lama is whispering in my ear as I rumble skyward. The whiskey reference is odd in light of the local dry-district regulations, but I later learn that Ananda Spa sits just beyond the district line; thus booze is available.

When I roll past a security gate into the entrance area, with its manicured gardens, a helicopter pad, and a man playing bagpipes (a throwback to colonial times), I garner a few looks.

"Does the valet take motorcycles?" I ask casually.

"Of course. We love Enfields," the manager says. He adds, "But you are the first to arrive by bike. Very unique."

I spend only a night at luxurious Ananda. I eat well (staying true to my new diet) and experience an ayurvedic treatment. Two men karate-chop my back with herb-filled bags. The only herb that has an English translation is cumin. At the end of the treatment, my back is sore but looser.

Somewhat reluctant to leave the luxe bubble, I motor downhill to the chaotic vitality that defines India. I arrive at the start of the evening aarti. Puja Swamiji walks by. His physical frame is small, yet his presence towers.

"You're back, Peter."

Slightly surprised, I mutter, "Yes. Nice to see you again, Swami."

With long, flowing, salt-and-pepper hair and beard, he glides past me, his saffron robes swaying. "Welcome home," he adds, glowing. I return my best head wobble.

Later that night I find Madhav. He is helping organize a large international party. The schedule is tight, and Madhav was hired to make sure everything clicks like clockwork—not easy in the Indian time zone. As I wait to chat with him, he is hounded with requests. Madhav answers each with grace and a friendly "can do" yogi cool.

IN THE FAMOUS EPIC Sanskrit poem Bhagavad Gita, Prince Arjuna has a serious discussion about life and duty with his friend Krishna, who is driving their chariot before heading into battle. Toward the end of the trip, Prince Arjuna marvels as his friend reveals his true identity: Lord Krishna. This revelation propels Arjuna toward some important truths.

As I watch Madhav go about his work, it occurs to me that this quiet, ever smiling man standing in front of me—my new friend, who has effortlessly guided me throughout my trip—is my symbolic charioteer (all right, motorcycle renter, travel adviser), helping me discover my inner om.

Sure, many of the lessons I'd experienced—stretch, breathe, eat slower and more healthfully (less coffee, even), relax—are simple. And, yes, replacing the stresses of too much work and too much TV and computer screen time with crisp swims in sacred waters followed by time warps in caves and motorcycle rides through Himalayan foothills could give most folks a greater peace of mind (unless, of course, you fear motorcycles). Yet Madhav, I realize, is the walking example of that knowing soul I aspired to be. Nothing, no matter the urgency or size, derails him. He doesn't live in a cave, nor did he guide me through a single pretzel contortion. Yet he taught me, almost daily, not necessarily how to walk the "yogi path" but how to understand it better and, most important, to realize that my mind needs as much stretching as my annoying back.

After two weeks of almost daily yoga, I can now touch my toes and even sit cross-legged through a meal. My back? The persistent pain hasn't entirely vanished. But it has subsided. Did my spine actually start to heal? I don't know, but neither I nor my inner om worries about it.

Photographer and writer **PETER McBRIDE** lives in Basalt, Colorado. He is the proud owner of a newly imported Royal Enfield motorcycle.

DREAD OF THE UNKNOWN. AN EMOTIONAL
ONE MAN TRAVELS FAR TO BREAK FREE OF

WHAT AM DOING HERE

Alien landscapes, such as this scattering of ancient pyramids in the desert of Sudan, can prove unnerving—and exhilarating.

MELTDOWN.
HIS FEARS

RE?

By **ANDREW McCARTHY**

CHRISTOPH BANGERT/ANP/MEDUX

THE EARTH WAS DRY AND HARD, THE WHEAT IN THE FIELD AROUND ME LOW AND SICKLY. A MIDDAY SUN BORE DOWN FROM AN EMPTY SKY. AND I WAS ON MY KNEES. SOBBING.

In the middle of northern Spain, halfway through a 500-mile walk along the Camino de Santiago (Way of Saint James) to the pilgrimage town of Santiago de Compostela, I was exhausted, tapped out, reduced to a weeping mess. I literally shook my fists at the heavens and cursed whatever God it was I half-believed in. This was far from the triumphant march across the Iberian Peninsula I had intended. But I wasn't railing against just the walk, though it had been a miserable few weeks of blisters, bad beds, and loneliness; I was despairing that I simply wasn't up to all that was required of me.

Unwittingly, I had attached metaphorical significance to my trudge: It had grown to represent the journey of my life so far. On this parched ground under a blistering sun, the symbolism I read into my present condition was not good. I seemed to lack some innate quality the journey demanded—something others obviously possessed. How could I have come so far only to end up like this?

Slowly I sat back on my heels, my tears subsided, my breathing slowed. Alone in a field of withering wheat that stretched to the horizon, I grew embarrassed. The space between my shoulder blades felt exposed and vulnerable. I rehoisted my backpack, picked up my walking stick—hurled aside in my tantrum—and shuffled on. At the next village, a dusty town named Castrojeriz, I found a room above a bar and fell into a heavy sleep.

The following morning I set out again. The air had a softness the day would devour, but hadn't yet. As I walked, I felt a lingering sense of frailty in the space between my shoulders, yet my pack seemed to rest easier on my back. After an hour, I stopped beside an old barn to drink some water—and noticed that my senses seemed unusually acute. The colors around me appeared heightened, more distinct: The umber of the dirt, the burnt red of the barn, the yellow of the tractor in the field were all more vivid than normal, their edges more sharply defined. I could hear birds call and respond in a way that seemed almost conversational. I grew conscious of my breathing, slow and rhythmic. And in a moment of clarity that I'd done nothing consciously to summon, I became aware of something I'd in some way known all my life. It disclosed itself with the simplicity of the absolute. There wasn't something lacking in my character; I had an overabundance of something. It had dictated so many of my actions, been behind so many decisions, obscured so much of my judgment.

FEAR, I SAW IN THAT MOMENT, had ruled my life. The vulnerability between my shoulders was the space created when the weight of that domineering, life-directing emotion had been temporarily relieved. It was in this experience of fear's absence that it began to lose its hold on me.

Fear is a peculiar thing, and a powerful one. We can convince ourselves that our decisions and actions are prudent, or wise, or even insightful, when it's closer to the truth to say they're motivated

by fear. In my home life I find it fairly easy to stay within a carefully constructed comfort zone—a zone often designed to accommodate and soothe certain fears. But this isn't possible when I'm in some distant locale and need to find a bed for the night. That it took a meltdown in the middle of Spain for me to see the cunning hand of my fear for the first time goes a long way toward demonstrating the grip the emotion had on me.

After my experience outside Castrojeriz I made a decision to travel more—often alone—to put myself in situations that drew me far from the familiar. Something had happened to me by the side of that barn, and I wanted more of it.

So I went to Southeast Asia—and on arrival in Singapore, found fear waiting for me in my hotel. Feeding on itself (the way fear does), it spun a shroud of anxiety that imprisoned me in my cramped room until I forced myself to go to the lobby, and then to walk around the block. There I spotted a subway station that reminded me of the subway back home, and descended the steps. An old man was offering to take photos for ID cards. He had few teeth and thin, wispy hair. When he saw me, he began to speak. He told me that he was 85 years old, that his wife had died in 1979, and that he had been baptized a year earlier and taken the name David. He showed me a book full of pictures of people who had blinked when he photographed them.

"But you, no blink," he coached me. "Control your eyes. Definite no blink. Light so bright. No blink. Smile!"

I did as I was told, and still have the photo of a slightly dazed, jet-lagged face with wide-open eyes. It was a minor interaction—but an indelible experience of connection, one that led to others and showed me there was a way out of my insular shyness. It led to a habit of reaching out, especially when I feel most isolated.

I traveled to Africa without a plan. I learned to not be afraid of loneliness on that trip; the feeling came and went, teaching me to be my own best company. I've rarely been lonely—and never feared it—since.

But fear is a clever opponent. It's not something dealt with once, then left in the past. It grows more subtle, more cunning, masquerading as exhaustion, disinterest—even good sense. In the Brazilian Amazon, I wanted to board a boat that would carry me 900 miles down the mighty river to the sea. Yet the chaos I saw at the dock in Manaus—the livestock, the tons of grain, the boats overloaded with families toting their life possessions on their backs and sleeping in hammocks—paralyzed me. So I persuaded myself it would be foolish to spend five days crammed aboard a listing riverboat with 300 Brazilians. Where and how would I sleep? What would I eat? I didn't speak the language—how would I communicate?

As I turned to leave, I came upon a man selling hammocks. I told myself that it would be nice to have a hammock back home,



*Long and often lonely,
the Way of St. James
challenges all who walk it.*



Crowded conditions on an Amazon riverboat intimidated the author, but the forced fellowship was exactly what he needed.

even if I didn't board the boat. I bought a yellow one. I saw an old woman selling nuts. Hungry, I bought a bag, followed by a few more. Returning to the dock, I began picking out the most "seaworthy" of the scores of vessels—just for fun. Since boat tickets were only a few dollars, I bought one, telling myself I simply would look around the deck, maybe sling my new hammock up and lie in it—just to see how that felt. Before I knew it, the boat had raised anchor—and I was seeing my first Amazonian sunset.

My memories of those five days are of backaches, bad food, and dirty toilets. As well as an unforgettable image of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, of yellow butterflies fluttering over the river while I stood alone on the bow at dusk. And of a small girl who woke me each morning, her round face popping up over the side of my hammock to begin a game of peekaboo. And of an old woman offering to share her plantain chips with me when I had no food left. We sat and munched together in contented silence, watching the river flow.

The micro-steps that got me onto the riverboat not only helped create a lifelong memory; they set a precedent for a similar type of incremental decision-making I'd use to confront fears rooted closer to home.

Yet fear can seep in in other ways. Not long ago I was scheduled to fly to Sudan, to see how people lived after being confronted with so much hardship for so long. When I mentioned the trip, people looked at me with shock. Why would I want to go to Sudan, they asked. The well-documented atrocities and political troubles taking place

there were cited as proof of my poor judgment. But travel for me has always been about something other than vacation (an hour on a beach, and I wonder what's next). Still, the doubts and uninformed worries I'd heard began to penetrate my psyche. As my departure date drew near, I became increasingly anxious. By the time I was in the airport, I was making bargains with myself.

"If the plane is delayed," I said silently, "I'll take it as a sign from the universe, and not go." I stared at the departure monitor, growing more and more uncomfortable as I waited for my fate to be decided. Then a small child sat down beside me, eager to board the plane—and I laughed at my runaway fear. I spent two weeks traveling in Khartoum and through Sudan's desert, where I met some of the most gentle, welcoming people I've ever encountered.

It's through travel that I've stared my fear in the face, revealing it for the phantom it is. Now, on the road, I'm a better version of myself, less defensive, more open, more curious. The person I bring home is closer to the one I want to be, and I'm damned if I'll let fear stop that.

My journey away from fear has taken me around the world. An accidental moment under a hot sun in rural northern Spain cracked me open, offering me a glimpse of how to live a different life from the one that had been leading me. Nothing has been the same since.

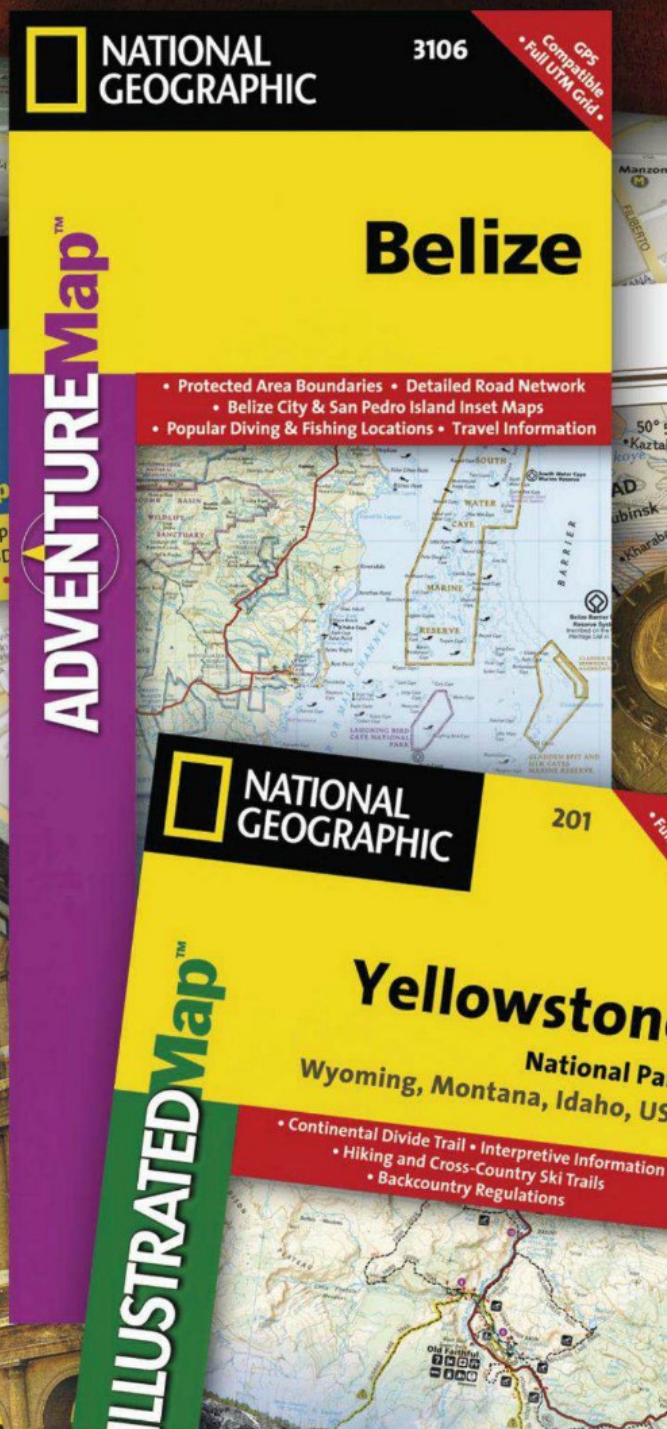
Traveler editor at large **ANDREW MCCARTHY's** new book, *The Longest Way Home: One Man's Quest for the Courage to Settle Down*, will be published this fall.

**IT'S THROUGH
TRAVEL THAT I'VE
STARED MY FEAR
IN THE FACE,
REVEALING IT FOR
THE PHANTOM IT IS.**



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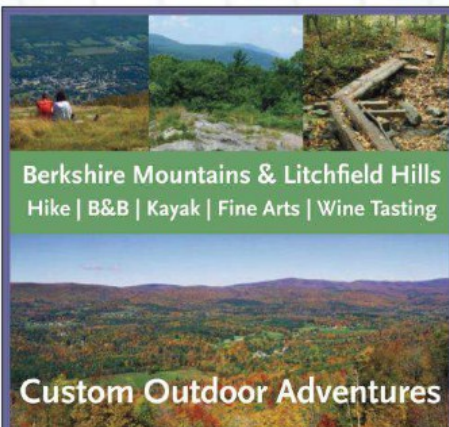
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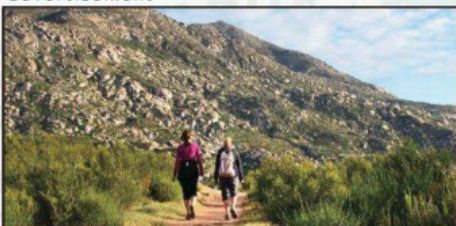
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TRAVELER GETAWAYS

Great Sphinx

IN ARABIC, IT'S CALLED "the father of terror." To us it's a riddle. Who built Egypt's Great Sphinx? No one can say for sure (though several of the more crazy theories finger space aliens). The huge limestone statue, as tall as the White House with paws bigger than city buses, was erected in the time of the Old Kingdom, probably during the reign of the Pharaoh Khafre, between the years 2558 and 2532 B.C. The crouching lion with a man's head was ancient when Cleopatra gazed upon it in 47 B.C. It retains its allure to the powerful, as world leaders from Napoleon to Barack Obama have trekked to Giza to contemplate the same view that captivated the queen of the Nile. —ANDREW NELSON

NAME GAME: The Sphinx is an alias, created by the ancient Greeks when the statue was already centuries old. The early name was Hor-em-akhet, meaning "Horus in the horizon." Horus is the Egyptian god of the sky.

TEST OF TIME: Out of the seven wonders of the ancient world, only the Giza Pyramids and the Sphinx are still standing.

COLOR ME MYSTERIOUS: It was originally painted in garish comic-book colors like red

(traces of the pigment can be seen by its ear).

COPYCAT: In Las Vegas, the Egyptian-themed Luxor Hotel's foam and plaster version is 35 feet taller than the original Sphinx, which rises 66 feet.

CLOSE SHAVE: The Sphinx originally sported a beard which eventually crumbled. A piece of its "stubble" is displayed in the British Museum in London.

SECRETS: Legend says the library of the sunken island of Atlantis is stowed beneath the Sphinx, with an entrance near its right paw. Nothing has been found, according to bemused archaeologists.

NOSE JOB: Contrary to popular history, Napoleon's cannonballs did not shoot off the Sphinx's nose. The evidence suggests the nose was intentionally cleaved off at least 300 years

QUIZZABLE

No one knows how the Sphinx lost its nose, but what movie offered an explanation?

- a) *Lawrence of Arabia*
- b) Walt Disney's *Aladdin*
- c) *The Mummy*

Astonishingly, a stone lion's head was found off the Sphinx's nose.

Answer: B

before the Little Corporal invaded Egypt in 1798.

PYRAMID SCHEME: If you don't like the Saharan sun, try booking a seat for the sound-and-light show at night when desert temperatures are cooler. The program bathes the Sphinx and pyramids in vivid colors as a narrator relays their history.

FRIEND IT: The Great Sphinx has a Facebook page.

During a visit to Giza in 1961, Louis Armstrong, aka Satchmo, serenades his wife.

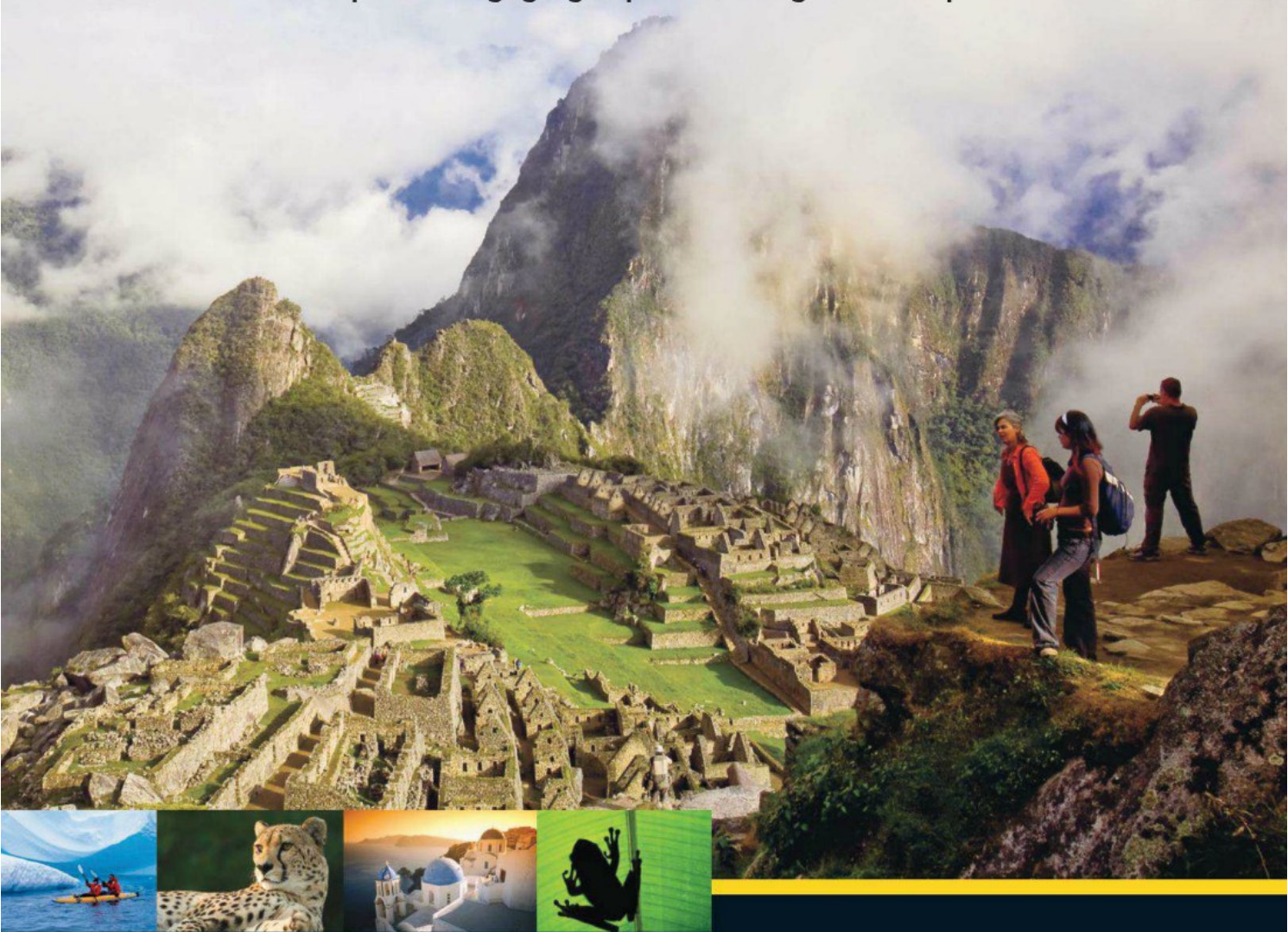


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Above: Travelers pause to take in the awe-inspiring ruins of Machu Picchu.

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